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THE STORY OF MARY AIKENHEAD.

QUARTERLY SERIES. VOLUME NINETY-SIX.

ROEHAMPTON :
PRINTED BY JOHN GRIFFIN.

THE STORY OF
MARY AIKENHEAD,

FOUNDRESS OF THE IRISH SISTERS OF CHARITY.

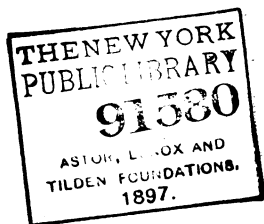
BY

MARIA NETHERCOTT.



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1897.
M. T.



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PREFACE.

IT is unnecessary to introduce to the public the life of one who has made herself far better known by her works than the words of another can possibly make her. The Institute established by the subject of this biography is before the world, its praise is in the mouth of all who can appreciate unselfishness and self-sacrifice, and it is more fittingly honoured by the blessings of the poor and the afflicted, than it can ever be by any encomium. The history of one to whom, under God, so beneficent a work is due, cannot be too widely known, and it is the object of this little book to assist in spreading such knowledge. The Life of Mary Aikenhead has, indeed, been already fully and lovingly written,¹ but there are probably some whom a comparatively large work will not reach, but who will be glad to learn something in briefer form of so noble a character, and will be benefited by so doing. It is to these that this slight sketch of her is offered.

¹ *Mary Aikenhead, her life, her work, and her friends.* By S. A. Dublin: Messrs. Gill, 1879; cheaper edition, 1882.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
Childhood	I
CHAPTER II.	
Conversion	II
CHAPTER III.	
Surroundings. Religious Vocation	22
CHAPTER IV.	
The First Visit to Dublin	31
CHAPTER V.	
Sisters of Charity for Ireland	38
CHAPTER VI.	
Return to Ireland. First Convent of the Sisters of Charity	50
CHAPTER VII.	
New Foundations	69
CHAPTER VIII.	
The Cholera Visitation. Reverend Mother Invalided	79
CHAPTER IX.	
St. Vincent's Hospital	99

	PAGE
CHAPTER X.	
The Mother General. Visitors to St. Vincent's . . .	113
CHAPTER XI.	
Daily Occupations. Trials	125
CHAPTER XII.	
More Foundations. An Ordeal for the Congregation . .	140
CHAPTER XIII.	
Our Lady's Mount. Foundation at Clonmel	153
CHAPTER XIV.	
Progress in Cork. Bereavements	166
CHAPTER XV.	
Benada Abbey	176
CHAPTER XVI.	
Death of Mrs. Aikenhead	188

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

MARY AIKENHEAD, the subject of this memoir, was born on the 19th of January, 1787, in the city of Cork. Her father, Dr. David Aikenhead, came of a good Scotch family, which had settled in Ireland about the middle of the eighteenth century. Clever at his profession, and with a remarkably attractive and genial personality, he soon attained success as a practising physician and chemist in Cork. Not only was he a favourite with the wealthy and influential classes, but also earned the blessings of the poor by his kind and charitable disposition. His political and religious principles were not such as to stand in the way of his advancement, both being in accordance with those of the ascendancy. It must, therefore, have been a great shock to his friends, and to the magisterial magnates and civic dignitaries, with whom he had always been on such good terms, when the doctor, forgetting his professional interests, chose for a wife a pious Catholic girl, in the person of Miss Mary Stacpole, the eldest daughter of a Catholic merchant of the city.

The Stacpoles, however, were a family whom

it was difficult to despise. They belonged to the best stock of the Anglo-Irish, who had sacrificed all for their religion. They were of Strongbow origin, and held good properties in Limerick and Clare. When the war of religions began, and the Irish were called upon to change their faith with the sovereign and English people, one branch conformed to Protestantism, and saved their estates, while another branch kept to the ancient faith, and lost all else. From this latter branch the Stacpoles of Cork were descended.

We find, then, in Mary Aikenhead—of Scotch descent on her father's side, Anglo-Irish on that of her mother—the three races were intermingled, a combination said to be specially conducive to good intellectual and other qualities. And perhaps to this may be in a measure traced some of the particular characteristics exhibited by her; the remarkable energy under circumstances which might have quenched a different spirit, mingled with the ardent steadfastness, the intense reverence, and the high spiritual qualities that distinguish the Celtic race.

In his marriage, Dr. Aikenhead made one important concession to the dominant creed. His wife should be free to follow her own religion, but whatever children Heaven might bestow upon them should be brought up as members of the Church by law established. So when their first-born—the future foundress of the Irish Sisters of Charity—came into the world, she was in due

time carried to the Protestant church, and baptized by the name of Mary. Soon after, according to the custom which then prevailed among the better classes, of sending their children to be nursed, or fostered, by the peasantry, she was placed with a woman named Mary Rorke, who lived on Eason's Hill, a healthy suburb on the north side of the river.

To this humble, pious soul is really due the credit of rearing her who was destined by Heaven to achieve a work which has brought such manifold blessings to our country and people. For so satisfactorily did Mrs. Rorke fulfil her part, and so well did the child thrive under her care, that she was allowed to remain with her devoted nurse till she was six years of age. Dr. Aikenhead, whatever his theory may have been, was not very rigid in his practice, as to his child's Protestant training. Probably he considered it time enough. And so, in the humble but neat cottage of her foster-parents, kneeling beside her "mammy," as she called Nurse Rorke, Mary learned to join in Catholic devotions, and to lisp the Rosary, gazing with awe and reverence on the shining crucifix depending from the long beads clasped in her tiny hand. She soon could distinguish the prayers said on the large beads from those said on the small ones, and she knew full well that she herself was the object of certain especially fervent petitions, without which the night prayers never concluded.

It scarcely needs to be mentioned, Mrs. Rorke being the devout soul she was, that long ere this she and a certain Molly Mullane, a trusty servant of the family, had carried the precious infant to the parish priest, and got her properly baptized a Catholic. On Sundays, Mary went with her mammy and Daddy John to Mass at the Bishop's chapel, as the church of the north parish was called.

For the penal rage was now abated, though the code yet remained unrepealed. It was no longer necessary for the faithful to gather with haste and secrecy in caves, and sand-pits, and lonely mountain glens; or, oftener still, in the midst of the vast, seemingly trackless bogs, which were as useful to the Irish Catholics of the sixteenth and two following centuries as the Catacombs were to the persecuted Christians of the first three centuries. Here, any persons not well acquainted with the way through, would hopelessly flounder, and neither the Ironsides of Cromwell, nor the priest-hunters of the next century, dared follow their prey into that shelterless, dangerous expanse, unless guided by some native renegade.

The names of numerous places throughout the land still bear testimony to that terrible time—the Glen of the Mass, the Mountain of the Mass. Many a spot is holy as a sanctuary, and the stones and the rocks are yet pointed out on whose surface the Sacred Mysteries were offered when, denied a tabernacle within the churches reared

for His worship, their Lord shared in the desolation of His people, and journeyed with them, carried upon the breasts of His faithful priests.

To daring and adventurous spirits, and to those sensitive temperaments in which the religious and the poetic instinct are inseparably blended, there was perhaps a certain charm and congeniality in these secret, perilous assemblings for worship. There was the gathering in the early morning, when, from far and near, the fugitive flock came, gentlefolk and peasants, carefully threading their way through the wilderness, the former, probably, following the guidance of some skilful scout; with the scent of the heather perfuming the free, healthy air, and the gleams and shadows of daybreak flitting over the bare brown stretches, the purple tracts, and dark, still pools, the deep silence, broken only by the Latin of the sacred rite, ascending to the throne of God, in union with the grandest Masses from the most splendid altars in other lands; the whirr of the wild bird's wing, and the lark singing his thanksgiving loudly and without fear, beyond the reach of man, and close to Heaven. But at any moment the danger signal might come from the keen-eyed sentinels stationed on the outposts, and in haste the congregation would scatter; but the priest must not forsake the altar, and to be found with the appurtenances for celebrating Mass, was at one period punishable by death, afterwards by transportation.

An attempt more determined, lengthened, and cruel than the worst persecutions under the Roman Emperors, was made in Ireland during that evil time, to debase a whole people below the level of humanity, and to stamp out their religion. The policy of Elizabeth was confiscation, that of Cromwell, extermination, but the policy of King William and his successors was *degradation*. No other nation ever invented a code so fitted to destroy both soul and body. The penal laws meant social, political, and moral death. Education was made a crime. The son was set against the father, brother against brother, by the atrocious enactment that the informer and betrayer should be rewarded with the estates and property of his victim. But the Catholic religion still survived in the hearts of the people. It could not be crushed, for it was Divine. Even in England, though it seemed to be dead, it was only sleeping, as we see now in the wonderful resuscitation that has taken place during the last half century, the hundreds, both among the clergy and laity, who have returned to the old religion. Within the Establishment itself the Spirit moves, and stealthily, one by one, the old doctrines and the old customs are being reintroduced. The best homage to the Catholic Church is this imitation of her, and this new desire to seize upon the Catholic name, formerly so little prized. But it is only like a bird taking little flights in its low-roofed cage. There can be no real ascent. To

soar freely upwards the boundaries must be burst asunder, and the captives come forth into the full light of that faith, with its imperial system of organization, and accumulated wisdom of centuries, which their forefathers permitted to be stolen from them.

Little Mary Aikenhead liked to go to Mass with her nurse, for children are natural Catholics. The glad, earnest part which children take in Catholic devotions is both remarkable and touching. They seem to regard the churches as belonging to *them*, as well as to the grown people, and freely pass in and out, of their own accord, when no service is proceeding, to say a little prayer before the altar, or kiss the feet of the crucifix. One is reminded of the Early Church, and the children of the Catacombs, whose toys have been found, and whose small graves lie so close together—some with the palm-branch and the red phial, denoting martyrdom—in those wonderful subterranean places, whose discoveries seem to bring so pathetically near to us in these days the individualities, the human affections, and the religious aspirations of the Christians in the first ages of the Church's life.

Sometimes Mary would meet her father driving to Shandon Church, as the bells were ringing over the city and the river, and he would stop, and call out to her, "Mary, come with me." But the child would cling closer to Mrs. Rorke's ample cloak, crying, "No, no, me won't go to

church with you ; me go to Mass with mammy." And the doctor would laugh, and drive on, saying, good-humouredly, "Well, then, God bless you, child, go !"

Mary led a thoroughly happy, healthy life. She played with the neighbour's children, and though it was easy to see that she belonged to a different class, Nurse Rorke observed with pleasure that she never took any airs of superiority with them, or prided herself on her daintier attire. Full of exuberant spirits, and occasionally hard to hold in check, she was yet most affectionate and good, and numerous were her friends and acquaintances among the humble denizens of Eason's Hill. She never was ashamed to acknowledge them on any occasion, and would often seize an opportunity, when her father came to see her, to say a good word for them, if she thought he might serve them by purchasing from them, or in any other way.

Sometimes she was taken to town, to enjoy a walk on the Grand Parade, a favourite promenade, where her beauty attracted much notice, and ladies and gentlemen would stop to ask whose child she was, and to admire her chestnut hair, and lovely changeful eyes, which some said were grey, others thought to be bright hazel, and others again averred were almost jet black. So freely was this admiration expressed, that the child soon learned to understand and appreciate it. But it did not spoil her, as it would have

done with most children. Vanity appears never to have held any place in her nature. So intelligent was she, that it was thought well she should begin to learn, and she was sent for a few hours each day to a school not far from the cottage, where she made quick and easy progress with her lessons.

But the time, postponed so long, for her removal home, came at length. Fortunately, she was not to part with her dear mammy, or the hearts of both of them would have nearly broken. It was arranged that Nurse Rorke should go also, to continue her care of Miss Mary, and to take charge of the other children, who had made their appearance by this time in the household. John Rorke could not be left behind in the cottage, and he too was assigned a post in the doctor's service. Dr. Aikenhead loved to make every one around him happy, and as he had become very prosperous, the means of doing so were in his power.

After a while the doctor began to think it was time his little daughter should go with him to the Protestant church. Mary was not so reluctant now as formerly; for she was beginning to take up remarks that she heard from the guests at her father's house, and to learn that Protestants were the most important people. She was pleased enough to sit in the comfortable, capacious pew at Shandon, where her white frock and pretty sash ran no risks of being crushed, as they often did at the Bishop's chapel. Here the *élite* of

Cork might be seen ; military officers and civil functionaries, the leading men of the law, and other professions, accompanied by their fashionably attired wives and daughters. The bells, loudly as they rang over "the pleasant waters of the River Lee," brought no crowd of pious poor in response to their call. Probably they would have been looked at askance by the fashionable congregation. If the Church of the Establishment was not respectable, it was nothing. Respectability was its *note* then, as it is still, whatever others it may lack.

"Mammy, do you ever say any prayers for me now?" asked Mary, one Sunday, after she had been for some time attending service at Shandon.

"To be sure I do, Miss Mary," replied nurse.

"Well, mammy, don't say any more prayers for me on the small beads ; say them only on the large ones."

Mrs. Rorke, however, refused to give up the "Hail Marys," persuaded that the grace of Baptism was not thus to die in her darling child's heart.

Another remark at this time indicated the heaven at work in the little girl's thoughts. Her grandmother, Mrs. Stacpole, offered her a pretty little rosary to decorate her doll's house.

"No, thank you, grandmamma," said the child, with dignity ; "all my dolls go to church except the kitchen-maid, and it is much too good for her !"

CHAPTER II.

CONVERSION.

IT is certain that at this time, to the majority of the pleasure-loving inhabitants of Cork, who belonged to the fashionable class—and probably elsewhere in Ireland as well—the religious difference between Catholics and Protestants had come to be the same as the social distinction between those in power and influence and the native Irish. The Irish were degraded to pariahs in their own land, and their creed, which outside these islands was that of the majority of Christians, and in time-honoured renown at the courts and palaces of Europe, was in Ireland regarded as beneath the notice of a gentleman or lady of birth and breeding.

Nor has this provincial feeling altogether died out yet. The Catholic religion, its inner life, and the vast range of its works, is truly a *terra incognita* to Protestants. The majority of them have little or no social intercourse with cultured Catholics of the upper and middle classes. Their ideas about the Catholic Church, its customs, and even its doctrines, are very often picked up from their servants, or else from some source, not

merely inadequate, but actually vitiated. They do not desire to know the real state of the case. What they want, in any inquiries, is merely to have their prejudices propped up. Otherwise they would go to efficient quarters for information.

The religion of the poor, in an especial sense, the true Church must always be. It was so from its foundation. But it is also the religion of the high-born and the cultured, or it would not have the note of universality. The Roman *ingenuus* and his slave stood side by side in the churches of the primitive Christians. The Catholic Church belongs to no nationality, to no class. And as to all nationalities and classes, so she is adapted to all manner of minds, thereby proving her supernatural origin. Full of infinite variety, like her own Mass music—"variety in unity"—she has a different side for each of her members, as suits their intellectual and spiritual needs. "She is the poet of her children," Cardinal Newman says, "full of music to console the sad and control the wayward, wonderful in story for the imagination of the romantic, rich in symbol and imagery."

The greatest mistake ever made by England was the endeavour to force the Reformation on a people like the Irish, who, both in religion and politics, need the visible symbol. What could Protestantism, without art, or beauty, or symbol, or reverence, do for them? In place of the Immaculate Mother, the solemn emotional ritual,

the mystic symbols of altar and Cross, they were offered the hard negations of the Thirty-nine Articles; while with the impious vaunt that it was the work of God, their noble and beautiful abbeys were plundered and laid waste, where not self, but the renunciation of self, was the pure ideal of the high ascetic life.

The Reformation was a rude revolt against all that is dignified and venerable; against that grace and refinement, that elegance of sanctity, which is the gift of the Catholic Church. It was a cold appeal to the lowest level of the understanding; not a sublime and implicit acceptance of a Divine revelation from the lips of a consecrated priesthood.

But the philosopher and the scientist, the speculator even, may also find within the Catholic Church a wide field for the exercise of their gifts, without ever trenching upon the defined truths of the faith. And for zealous workers, for those who dedicate their whole lives to the service of God, what a vast area her divinely-organized system affords for all their activity, both physical and intellectual!

As Mary Aikenhead grew older, she was frequently at her grandmother's house, with the result that some of the prejudices she had imbibed at Shandon began rapidly to wear away.

The Stacpoles appear to have been a singularly pleasant and genial family, and the atmosphere of the household was such as even a child could

appreciate—at least, so intelligent a child as Mary. Two or three of her unmarried aunts lived there, and her uncle, Philip Stacpole, who was then the master of the house, and the representative of the Stacpole race.

Cork was an interesting spot in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Conversation in Catholic company was especially varied and full of interest. Most of the gentlemen had been abroad, and had received their education in France, Portugal, or Spain, the Penal Code rendering home education impossible. Even to obtain it on the Continent, a few years earlier, various ingenious devices had to be resorted to, and gentlemen's sons were often taken off from remote parts of the coast by smuggling vessels, with other contraband freight. Aspirants to the priesthood embarked in a like hazardous fashion, or got away in fishing-boats, and the return to their native island was effected through the same friendly agencies. Many of these had deeply interesting stories to tell. Some of them had known officers of the Irish Brigade. Others could relate tales of the old *régime* in France, and others, again, not many years returned, had been in Paris during the Reign of Terror, and had run hair-breadth escapes of their lives. The times were still full of excitement, both on the Continent and in Ireland, where the revolutionary spirit was beginning to make itself heard in the murmurs of approaching rebellion.

The events of more remote times were also frequently discussed in the Stacpole circle, for the family held their dead kinsfolk in fond remembrance. But there was one subject which could only be mentioned with caution in their presence: this was the Battle of Anghrim, for so many of their relations had fallen on that occasion, that they could not bear an allusion to the ill-fated day.

The piety of the family was as conspicuous as their charm. They usually attended the chapel of the south parish, which they had partially rebuilt at their own expense, venturing to give it a more prominent character than was customary with Catholic places of worship, which it was considered ought not to be obtruded upon the view of respectable people. Mrs. Stacpole, however, frequently went to evening devotions at the Bishop's Chapel; and Mary, who now loved to follow her grandmother, sometimes went with her to the holy place she had formerly known so well. Once more she heard, and soon gladly joined in the beautiful devotion of the Rosary. She began even to use it in her private prayers at home, managing, in lieu of a set of beads, which she would not have refused now, to count the *Ave Marias* by some devices of her own.

After some time her widowed aunt, Mrs. Gorman, who had been abroad, returned to Ireland, and settled down with her relations in

Cork. A strong attachment grew up between her and her bright, clever young niece. One day Mary joined her aunt as she was on her way to Mass. It happened that there was Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament after Mass. Mary had never before been present during that sacred rite. She was greatly struck and impressed, and asked her aunt for an explanation, which Mrs. Gorman, who was a fervent Catholic, gladly gave. Mary was deeply interested, and wished to know more of the Catholic religion. She was so evidently in earnest that her aunt placed in her hands some Catholic books of a nature calculated to instruct her. These she read with eager attention. After a while, upon one excuse or another, she began to absent herself on Sundays from the service at Shandon, and to go alone to the chapel to hear Mass in the mornings.

These private expeditions were more easily managed than might have been supposed. A free and easy style characterized society in Cork. Hot-house rearing was not approved of for children. The young Aikenheads went and came very much as they chose. If the children did not appear at bedtime, they were sought for, and generally found, in some of the neighbouring houses, or if they had missed their way, some one would be sure to bring them home. Mrs. Gorman noticed the direction of Mary's morning walks, and she became yet more interested in the young girl, whose childish mirthfulness was now

giving place to a serious and thoughtful disposition. She knew that a struggle was going on in Mary's mind between the anti-Catholic prejudices which still lingered, and her instinctive veneration for the ancient faith. How long this indecision might have continued, who can tell, had not an event occurred which no doubt hastened matters.

In 1798 Dr. Aikenhead, who was then about fifty years of age, had retired from his practice, and the establishment of Aikenhead and Dupont passed into other hands. What his reasons were for this step, and what his ultimate plans would have been, cannot be known. It seems that, although his earlier sympathies had been all in accordance with the dominant party, in later life he came to share in the national aspirations of the people. There appears no doubt that he was a member of the United Irish Society, and warmly entered into all their plans. It is related that on one Sunday afternoon, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, in the guise of a Quaker gentleman, sought refuge in his house, when one of the doctor's genially hospitable entertainments was proceeding. On the invitation of Dr. Aikenhead, he sat down to dinner with the company, none of whom in the least suspected the new guest's identity. But soon the pleasant party was disturbed by the arrival of troops, with the sheriff at their head. Before they had time to enter, however, the Friend had disappeared, and all that the sheriff and his men could do was to

ransack the house for papers. Whether these new political connections of the doctor had anything to do with his retirement, does not appear.

He did not live long to enjoy his greater ease. Towards the close of the year 1801 he became seriously ill. Knowing his danger, he received the visits of a Protestant clergyman, who prayed with him, and no doubt did what he could. But the dying man was restless and dissatisfied, and at last, to the great consolation of his wife, he asked to have a Catholic priest brought to him. After some conversation, he expressed his desire to be received into the Catholic and Apostolic Church. Having made his profession of faith, he breathed his last on the 28th of December, consoled by the presence and ministrations of the Bishop, Dr. Moylan, and with his Catholic wife by his side, and the faithful Mary Rorke standing among the sorrowing group which surrounded him.

This event had naturally a great effect on Mary, though for a while she still hesitated about taking the final step. At length, however, the crisis came. It happened that she heard a sermon from Dr. Florence MacCarthy, on the parable of Lazarus and Dives, which moved her greatly, and led her to see things in a clearer light than ever before. She realized that her indecision was not caused by any real difficulties in her mind regarding the faith itself, and she understood that once this was the case, to remain inactive for any human considerations whatso-

ever, amounted to a refusal to follow the Divine light, and was a deliberate choice of the passing advantages and idle opinions of this world in preference to the everlasting blessedness of the Heavenly Kingdom. However well one might use these advantages, however harmlessly live, still, it was to place ourselves in the same category with the rich man in the parable, and consequently to incur his doom. The cross had never been borne; the crown would never be won. She made up her mind on the moment to cast in her lot with the despised and oppressed members of the Body of Christ, whom, having suffered in this world, He will hereafter call to a heavenly recompense. This one thought now possessed her.

"I shall never be happy until I am a Catholic," she said to her aunt, of whose affectionate interest and sympathy she was always sure.

"Then why not become one at once?" Mrs. Gorman replied.

So it was arranged. She entered immediately on a course of instruction and devout preparation, and on the 6th of June, 1802, Mary Aikenhead was received into the Holy Roman Catholic Church. She was then in her sixteenth year. She made her first Communion on the festival of SS. Peter and Paul; and on the 2nd of July, the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, she received the Sacrament of Confirmation from Dr. Moylan. These dates were ever afterwards

remembered by her, and to her life's end she never failed to celebrate their anniversaries with joy and thanksgiving.

She did not choose the Catholic religion for the sake of any outward attribute of beauty or attraction. These were not prominent at that time in Ireland. The face of the suffering Church—like that of her Divine Founder, which was originally radiant with perfect beauty, but, under the pressure of His bitter afflictions, “marred more than any man’s”—was then all bedimmed and tear-stained, from the malice of her enemies. And as Mary Aikenhead did not choose the Church for any outward comeliness, but for the beautiful Soul that she recognized within it, so was her attachment solid and lasting.

Those who are mainly led by the æsthetic charm of the Catholic Church, may expect disappointment at any time, and are in peril of failing. They may be placed under circumstances when, for them, the Church is represented by some little country chapel, or a room in some English town where there is but a small struggling mission; music, elegant and artistic surroundings, will all be wanting. If these were all they cared for, woe to them! But if not, the Holy Mass will still be the same in all respects—the one “clean Oblation;” and the sermon, whether delivered in homely or in cultured language, will teach precisely the same high truths. This is one of the striking differences

between the Catholic religion and the Ritualistic party in the Church of England. Take away *their* surroundings—their incense, their flowers, all those things they have copied from the Mother Church to dress themselves out with—and their “Mass” dwindles at once into the ordinary Protestant Communion, as it is administered in the lowest parish church, in the least impressive fashion.

CHAPTER III.

SURROUNDINGS. RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

DR. AIKENHEAD had left his family well provided for, so that they were able to continue their former mode of life almost unchanged. Mary's younger sisters, Margaret and Anne, were sent to the Ursuline Convent to be educated with their Catholic cousins, whose mother, Mrs. Hennessy, was a sister of Mrs. Aikenhead.

From her infancy, Mary had shown in a remarkable degree the best characteristics of her father and mother—a breadth of charity, an impartial judgment, and a steady purpose, mingled with much sweetness and gentleness. Before she was eighteen years of age, she was in fact the head and mainstay of the family, and it was to her that the widow turned in every difficulty. Mrs. Aikenhead, a gentle, amiable woman, who had been devoted to her husband, felt the loss of his good management as well as of his constant affection. The income of the family was principally derived from house property and other sources which required much looking after, and as her health was delicate, she found her new duties very fatiguing to her. But

the remarkable business capacities which Mary developed soon enabled her to relieve her mother of these cares, and she also assisted her in bringing up the children. Her education had been good; for there were excellent schools in Cork at that time, and she had attended one for several years. French, in particular, was well taught in these schools by competent professors, and to be able to speak French with ease was essential in Cork society at that period, the majority of those who composed it being as familiar with French as with English. Nearly all the Catholic priests had studied abroad, and neither they nor others who had been educated in France were disposed to forget the language of a country which had always shown such a friendly disposition towards them.

There seems to have been somewhat of a Continental flavour about the entertainments in Catholic circles in those days; a lightness, a grace and elegance, mingled with the genial hospitality that abounded among all classes. It was apparent also in the carefully cooked viands, which showed that the host was not inclined to despise good foreign customs; and the rare wines which circulated were frequently sent home by exiled kindred who were now merchants abroad. In fact, at that time in Ireland, the French, and all Continental strangers, were less regarded as foreigners than the English. For even the poor had their connections abroad—the

descendants of those who had sailed away with the "Wild geese," many of whom had now risen to high positions in France, Spain, and Austria, while numbers of others had emigrated to America; and these still kept up a friendly interchange of letters with their relatives in the old land.

The circle in which Mary Aikenhead spent the first twenty-one years of her life, was certainly neither an insipid nor a narrow one; and, joined to the rational liberty of action she had always enjoyed, no doubt did much to develop and mature her character. Among her father's relations she met the best Protestant society, and among those of her mother the highest in Catholic circles. It was always her opinion—putting aside any natural predilections—that the Catholic society was the most agreeable and vivaciously intellectual; which no doubt was true, for level prosperity, however comfortable, does not tend to the development of original qualities in a people.

Among the guests at the houses of the Catholic citizens of Cork, the clerical element was well represented, and contributed much to enrich the general fund of conversation and keep it at a high standard. There was the Bishop, Dr. Moylan, with his flowing patriarchal locks, who was not only loved and venerated by his own flock, but much esteemed by the Protestant party. He had lived through stirring times, when one striking

event succeeded another—the rebellion of '45, the American War, the French Revolution, and the insurrection of '98. Having studied at the University of Toulouse, he was appointed after his ordination by the Archbishop of Paris to the charge of a parish in the capital. But a longing to return to his own land possessed him, and after a time he gave up his good position and sailed for Cork, to consecrate his whole life to the service of the oppressed Catholics of the old country. There was also his coadjutor, Dr. Florence MacCarthy, a younger brother in a family of ancient lineage; there were the pastors of the different parishes, and several members of Religious Orders resident in Cork at that time.

About this period, Mary Aikenhead had the pleasure of meeting Bishop Milner, who, being in Ireland, came to stay at the house of his great friend, Dr. Moylan, and was most favourably impressed by the Irish, whose education he considered to be very much beyond that of the same class in England, in spite of the extraordinary efforts of the Government to prevent them from learning. The Cork people appear to have delighted in doing him honour, and remembered his visit as a very pleasant event. We are sure that Mary Aikenhead must have been deeply interested in listening to his conversation. She did not take much part in talk herself, but whatever observations she made always evinced thought and were to the point.

She must indeed have been no insignificant member of the society in which she mingled. Her appearance at this time was exceedingly attractive: tall, with a graceful, well-proportioned figure, and singularly expressive, changeful eyes, whose colour, as in her childhood, it was hard to define. She was a great favourite with both old and young. She had an agreeable manner, a cheerful temper, and the quality of being able to recognize whatever was best in those she came in contact with, and so to be companionable and helpful to all. It was observed that there was a certain youthful dignity about her, which blended pleasantly with an easy, unaffected mirthfulness. She was fond of reading, and well acquainted with the best literature of the day. She delighted in all that was refined, beautiful, and intellectual. Her love of nature was intense, and provided enjoyments for her to the end of her life. She took part in all the innocent amusements of her circle: the musical reunions, the dances, and in summer the boating excursions, which were a favourite pastime among the upper classes in Cork at that time. Apparently the Cork people in those days knew how to enjoy themselves without making it a weariness; their parties were not kept up till unnatural hours; the young people usually walked home; the young ladies merely pinned up their pretty white dresses, exchanged their coloured shoes for more substantial ones, and, drawing the hoods of their cloaks over their

heads, set out, escorted by their gentlemen friends; while the dowagers, comfortably seated in their sedans, proceeded a short way in advance, the gleam of the chairmen's lanterns relieving the gloom of the scantily-lighted streets.

But wherever Mary Aikenhead might have been the previous night, it was remarked that she never was late for ten o'clock Mass next morning. Nor did amusements or housekeeping duties or monetary affairs ever leave her without time to devote to the poor. She was a good manager, and while attending well to domestic concerns and commonplace transactions, did not give to these things a more important place than they should reasonably occupy. Accompanied by a young friend of kindred disposition, Miss Cecilia Lynch, she made daily rounds of the poorest quarters of the town, bringing comfort and relief to the sick and sorrowful. She was adored by all the poor people, who sent blessings after her as she threaded her way through the narrow, miry lanes. Those who had known her from the Eason Hill days, regarded her with mingled love and pride; for was she not their own Miss Mary? and they seemed to think it reflected credit on themselves that she had grown into such a beautiful and noble-looking young lady.

From the day when Dr. MacCarthy's touching sermon on Dives and Lazarus had influenced her decision, he had been her true friend, and he was now her confessor. It must have been a great

advantage to her to have in this capacity one who was so able and sympathetic, and who was always willing, whenever possible, to spare a little time for familiar conversation on intellectual subjects. She found combined in him, friend, father, and spiritual director. In his life she had a constant example before her of the most unbounded charity and apostolic zeal for souls; for he was utterly devoted to the poor, and each day was a round of service to others and of self-sacrifice.

It may be that none of Mary Aikenhead's friends, at this time, thought of or desired any other lot for her than that she should make a good and happy marriage, pass an easy life in the midst of the society she was so well fitted to grace, fulfilling all her duties, and giving whatever time and aid she could spare to works of benevolence and charity. But her own thoughts were far different. In fact, for a long time her mind had been fully made up to prefer the religious to a secular state. At present she did not feel herself at liberty to leave her home; she was also uncertain as to what Order she should select. To consecrate herself in Religion to the service of the suffering poor was the work she desired; but then there was no Order in Ireland, nor ever had been, in which the union of outside charitable work was combined with the religious life, and whose rule it was to visit the destitute in their own homes, and to tend the

sick in hospitals. It is true there had been some hopes at one time that an institute of this kind might be founded in Cork, but the difficulties in the way were too great, and the idea had to be abandoned. Still, the subject occupied Mary Aikenhead's thoughts, and she listened with eager interest and kindling eyes to the accounts brought back from France of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, and their work on the Continent.

There were but two convents in Cork at this time, one belonging to the Ursulines, the other to the Presentation Order. Mary had relations and several dear friends among the former. Mother Louis Moylan, sister of the Bishop, was the Superioress, and a warm friendship existed between her and Mary. Another great friend of hers among the Ursulines was Mother Borgia MacCarthy, the sister of the coadjutor Bishop. Naturally these friends were desirous that she should join them, and Mary sometimes thought she might do so. But noble and useful as was the object of the Daughters of St. Ursula, it was a very different one from that which she had set before herself, and where she felt her special vocation lay. Theirs was the work of training and educating the children of the rich, so as to fill worthily their places in social life and be intelligent companions for their brothers and husbands. The Presentation Nuns, it is true, were vowed to the poor, and their vocation was to save the children of the lower orders from

the misery and degradation of ignorance. Their schools were filled to overflowing with the multitudes of these little ones, and the work was surely a Christ-like undertaking. But they were bound to enclosure, and could not go abroad to aid the destitute and tend the sick.

Perhaps, however, the final decision would have been in favour of this Order, had not her friend, Miss Lynch, who was preparing to enter a convent of Poor Clares at Harold's Cross, Dublin, exacted a promise from her to make no immediate decision, as she was very anxious Mary should have an opportunity of visiting the Convent of St. Clare, and hoped that she might then see her way to choosing that Order.

It happened that an occasion for going to Dublin soon offered itself. At the close of 1807, Mary made the acquaintance of Mrs. O'Brien, whose brother, then at college, was afterwards the well-known Judge Ball. She had come to Cork to be present at the profession of one of her sisters at the Ursuline Convent. A warm friendship, which was destined to be life-long, sprang up between her and Mary Aikenhead, and when leaving Cork, Mrs. O'Brien invited Miss Aikenhead on a visit to her in Dublin. The invitation was willingly accepted, and soon after Mary set out, and remained for some time the guest of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien, at their town house in Mountjoy Square.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST VISIT TO DUBLIN.

It was in 1808 that Mary Aikenhead came to Dublin. She found the capital a sad contrast to gay, busy Cork. The city was still suffering from the effects of the Union. The streets were silent and deserted. A mournful and hopeless stagnation rested upon all things. The fine houses were left desolate, for the Irish nobility and gentry had broken up their Dublin establishments, and all who could afford it had gone to England. Both Catholics and Protestants suffered from the new state of things. The Catholics had been promised that Emancipation was to follow the Union; but it appeared as if no faith were ever to be kept with Irish Catholics, and upwards of twenty years had yet to pass before the measure was wrung from an unwilling Government, too late for gratitude from the embittered hearts of a long oppressed people. It is estimated that when, after the Union, the Members of Parliament crossed the Channel to spend their money in London, and the aristocracy either went with them or retired to their country mansions, the pecuniary loss to the metropolis was some-

thing like an annual withdrawal of one million sterling. To all ranks of life came a sudden subsidence in their means of living; and if the level of affluence and of hope was low even in the upper portion of society, it sank beneath what was human in the lower strata of Dublin existence. The very wants of the poor were in themselves quite eloquent enough to create a rapidly caught idea that the corresponding need of the hour was a Religious Order which could combine the consecrated life of prayer with a personal visitation of the destitute in their wretched homes. It was this, at least, which became yet more strongly impressed upon Mary Aikenhead's mind as she contemplated the state of things around her.

Her time in Dublin was not passed in idleness. Mrs. O'Brien was engaged in all manner of active good works. Each day the two friends took their way through the most miserable quarters of the city, bringing to the afflicted and poverty-stricken inhabitants comfort and substantial help.

In the ruin which had fallen upon so many after the Union, Mr. O'Brien, being partner in a mercantile house engaged in the foreign import trade, had not shared. All his relations were in good circumstances, and as he cordially sympathized with his wife's charitable disposition, she had full liberty of action, and the pecuniary means at her command of accomplishing much good.

Mrs. O'Brien appears, indeed, to have been a lady of a singularly high and noble spirit. She was at this time not more than twenty-three years of age; strikingly handsome and distinguished looking. To a superficial observer, she might have appeared a mere woman of fashion; but elegant as was her attire, perfect as were the appointments of her house, these things were not her chief interests; and Mary Aikenhead, with the keen insight peculiar to her, had at once recognized this. Mrs. O'Brien had very decided opinions as to the duties of Catholics at that time. She thought they should no longer hide in back streets, nor wear the sad, scared look of the hunted deer; but let them hold up their heads boldly, not submitting to be looked down upon, and take the social position that properly belonged to them, while awaiting their political rights.

And yet, though trodden down, and her people made almost abjectly servile through coercion and penal laws, Ireland had some compensation for her sufferings. Many holy and sacred things spring up in a nation's soul from the seed sown by persecution. Suffering purifies and refines. The marvel, indeed, is that the Irish endured as they did, and were not utterly extinguished as a people. But they had the consciousness of suffering in a good cause—for their nation and their religion. Much was due also to the intellectual vivacity which enabled them to throw

their interest into remote concerns when the present gave them nothing; to the tenacity with which they clung to ancient customs, and maintained their reverence for worthy ideals, and to the spiritual cast of their mind, which supplied assuagements that would have had no power to comfort a people of grosser nature. In the mornings Mrs. O'Brien and her guest were generally engaged in helping some work connected with their own or an adjoining parish chapel, and in attending to the altar.

At that time the venerable Dr. Betagh was pastor of the parish chapel of St. Michael and St. John, waiting for the return of the Society of Jesus to Dublin. The chapel of St. Michan, in Mary's Lane, was also served during a long course of years by members of the Society of Jesus. The devotions practised in the Jesuit churches abroad were kept up in this chapel, which on that account was much frequented by the devout. The altar was attended to by several ladies of the parish, among them being Mrs. O'Brien's younger sister, Miss Fanny Ball, to whom was afterwards due the establishment of the Loretto Order in Ireland. The parish chapel of the O'Briens was St. Mary's, in Liffey Street, of which Father Daniel Murray was curate; and in this humble edifice the Archbishop, Dr. Troy, frequently officiated.

All the Catholic chapels were hidden away amongst the poorest tenements in the most

squalid parts of the city. St. Mary's could only be entered by a narrow passage, nor was it seen at all from the street. The interior was very gloomy. The small windows, ranged on one side only of the building, permitted the sunbeams to rest but dimly on the one thing of beauty the chapel contained—an exquisite Virgin and Child, copied after Raphael, and hung over the altar. But unsightly as were these structures, they were sacred to those who worshipped within them as the chapels of the Catacombs to the early Christians, and many a tradition and tender association clung to each which made it doubly hallowed ground.

St. Mary's was too small for the congregation, and on Sundays the little yard and the narrow passage beyond were filled with a devout multitude, striving to get near enough to catch the tinkling of the altar-bell announcing the solemn moment of consecration. The rich came in their carriages, for this was considered a fitting mark of respect, and those who went in an informal manner to an early Mass only, were thought to be but poor confessors of the faith, in fact, rather wet Catholics.

The Catholics of Dublin, and throughout the country, were at this time timidly feeling their way, availing themselves of any small advantages they could, glad, at least, of the tacit liberty allowed them to follow their religion in peace. But the dawn of Emancipation was breaking;

and as, after the Peace of Constantine, the Christians of Rome poured forth in their thousands from the caverns of the earth, so the Irish Catholics would soon emerge from their hiding-places into the open daylight; wounded and beggared indeed, but still with unvanquished spirit and full of vitality. And gradually the old chapels would be replaced by stately and beautiful churches, and the Mass bell would sound once more over the land, summoning the faithful to the Holy Sacrifice.

At the house of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien, Mary Aikenhead frequently met the Rev. Daniel Murray, who was a dear and greatly esteemed friend of theirs. He often accompanied them home after early Mass on week-days, and breakfasted with them, when many charitable projects were discussed. The impression his conversation made on Mary was exceedingly favourable, and her opinion of his sanctity very high.

Shortly after coming to Dublin, Mary Aikenhead had gone to visit her friend, Miss Lynch, at the new convent of the Poor Clares at Harold's Cross. The difficulties about obtaining this residence unfold such an extraordinary page in the No-Popery mania of the time, that they are worth a passing reference. To us now they seem ludicrous, but must have been tiresome enough then. Landlords objected to lease their houses to nuns. The friendly lawyer, therefore, who had the management of the affair, simply told

the proprietor that the house was required by a lady who had a great many sisters. It was not till the Mother Abbess and her community were established in their new abode, that the neighbours found out they actually had a nunnery in their midst. No doubt there was then a general lifting up of hands and turning up of eyes among all those respectable persons. They insisted that the lady and her sisters should be walled up, and proceeded without loss of time to erect a very high wall around the convent, which completely hid it from public view. This was all they could do, and as the daughters of St. Clare had no objection to being thus excluded from the sight of the great world, the arrangement proved yet more satisfactory to them.

Much as Mary Aikenhead might have desired to join her friend, she saw at once that in the Franciscan Order she could not find what she sought. In any case she could not have entered a convent just then, as too many home duties devolved on her, in consequence of her mother's delicate health, to permit of her doing so. Nevertheless, she remained firmly resolved to dedicate her life to the service of God in His poor, and feeling assured that a way would be opened to her when the right moment came, she returned home, and with cheerful serenity resumed her usual routine of duties and works of piety and charity amongst the poor around her.

CHAPTER V.

SISTERS OF CHARITY FOR IRELAND.

MARY AIKENHEAD had not long returned to Cork, when bereavement entered her home. Her mother became dangerously ill, and after a few days died, leaving to her eldest daughter the sole charge of the family. This event seemed to remove still farther the realization of Mary's desires. For the present, however, it left her personally freer, and after a time—her two sisters having been placed as boarders at the Ursuline Convent—she was able to accept the pressing invitation of her friends, the O'Briens, to visit them again in Dublin.

Since her last visit some important events had taken place. One of these, which gave much satisfaction in Catholic circles, and very particular pleasure to the O'Brien family, was the elevation of the curate of St. Mary's to the episcopal dignity. Daniel Murray was now Archbishop of Hierapolis, and coadjutor in the see of Dublin, having been consecrated in November, 1809, in St. Mary's chapel, Dr. Betagh preaching the sermon on the occasion.

Dr. Murray had now begun seriously to consider the possibility of founding a Congregation of Irish Sisters of Charity, and had the project warmly at heart. It happened that some words of Mary Aikenhead's, when speaking with Miss Lynch at St. Clare's, were repeated to him, and struck him as a good indication. Sister Ignatius Lynch had been telling her friend of Dr. Murray's intention of founding a community of Sisters of Charity, and that he had proposed to her to remain disengaged until the foundation could be made. "But," she added, "I did not feel up to the responsibility of a new Order."

"O Cecilia! why did you not wait?" exclaimed Mary Aikenhead, with extreme earnestness.

Dr. Murray was also greatly impressed by her fervour on one occasion when he and the Bishop of Cork, who was in Dublin at the time, were discussing the projected foundation. Mary Aikenhead, kindling at once at the idea, turned to Dr. Moylan, exclaiming earnestly: "Oh, my lord, when will *you* bring Sisters of Charity to Cork?"

These expressions strengthened the opinion Dr. Murray already held, that she was herself the instrument chosen by Providence to carry out the work. He therefore commissioned Mrs. O'Brien to speak to her friend, and endeavour to engage her co-operation. Mary replied that if an efficient Superior and two or three members undertook the work, she should certainly think

that in joining them she was doing what God required of her.

From this visit she went to her relations at Mallow, Dr. and Mrs. Galway, who were earnest, just-minded Protestants, willing to allow to others the liberty to follow their convictions. She found it difficult, however, owing to the family arrangements, to attend to her religious duties while in their household, and going to Holy Communion necessitated a one o'clock breakfast. Dr. Murray was now her kind and constant correspondent, and gave her much valuable counsel. He did not approve of this practice, though admiring her spirit, and advised her to discontinue it, as too injurious to health, and, after her return, to make herself amends for the losses sustained.

About this time a great sorrow visited Mary Aikenhead, and spread grief over the whole south of Ireland, by the death of Dr. MacCarthy, who fell a victim to his apostolic zeal. Passing one day through a part of the town, not in his own district, where a virulent form of fever was raging, he was told that a poor creature lay dying in one of the houses. A neighbour entreated the Bishop not to risk his life by entering; but his reply was, "I will go, and save that soul." He went in, attended to the spiritual needs of the dying man, caught the fever, and died after a few days' illness.

The following year, 1811, Mary Aikenhead was again in Dublin. The projected institute was now

being quite definitely discussed, and Dr. Murray devoted to the subject all the time and attention he could spare. But the state of public affairs was very pressing at this time. The question of the Veto was agitating all classes who cared for the interests of the Catholic Church. The people, deceived so often, distrusted the overtures of the English statesmen, and were roused almost to frenzy by the crafty attempt which they saw was being made by the Government to enchain the Church it had failed to destroy. Better do without Emancipation for ever than thus gain it! This was the sentiment of O'Connell, warmly endorsed by the multitude. Things being in this state, it was necessary, during several years, for Dr. Murray to undertake journeys to Paris and Rome, which often involved considerable absences from Ireland.

Meanwhile, the ladies engaged in charitable work in Dublin did not wait for the establishment of the new community to give their benevolent thoughts practical shape. A house was taken in Ash Street, near the Coombe, for the purpose of sheltering a number of poor girls of good character, but in need of refuge. Mrs. O'Brien was unwearied in her care of the new institution. Mary Aikenhead also constantly visited at Ash Street, helped in the work, and was warmly interested in every project connected with the undertaking. It was quite determined that the Refuge should be transferred to the Sisters of

Charity as soon as they should be able to take it up.

Mary sometimes wondered who was to be the leader in the future work. At last, to her great consternation, she learned that it was she herself who was to be the foundress of the new Order. A certain timidity and self-distrust, a shrinking from putting herself forward in any way, had always characterized her. She greatly under-estimated her own abilities, and though eminently fitted to rule—as afterwards appeared—she seems at this period to have been quite unconscious that she possessed any great qualities. Dr. Murray, however, knew her better in this respect than she knew herself, and was not afraid to place her in this most onerous position. At first she absolutely declined to accept the responsibility. It was not without much difficulty that Dr. Murray at length partly overcame her reluctance. She reserved her final consent, however, until after she should have made a carefully prepared general confession to the Archbishop, thinking, perhaps, that this might lead him to alter his opinion as to her fitness for the work; or, at least, desiring that he should know fully the whole soul of her to whom he was committing so holy and arduous a charge. But Dr. Murray remained as decided as ever, and assured her most solemnly that it was God's will she should carry out the work; for the time was evidently ripe when the foundation should be made. His

friend, Dr. Everard, now President of Maynooth College, who was warmly interested in the undertaking, also did all he could to cheer and encourage her. At length she gave her full consent, and agreed to begin preparations at once for leaving Cork at the earliest date possible.

It was arranged that she was to go through a year's noviceship at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, at York—an ancient religious house which had existed in England through many troubles, and for long was the only convent in the country. Here the duties somewhat resembled those to be carried out in the new community, as the nuns made no vow of enclosure, and went out to visit the sick. One companion was to go with her, Miss Alicia Walsh, a lady of good family, highly intelligent and amiable, about fourteen years older than Mary Aikenhead. This lady, having heard of the project, offered herself to the Archbishop to accompany Miss Aikenhead to York, go through the religious training with her, and join the new Congregation.

On Trinity Sunday, 1812, Mary Aikenhead, having broken all earthly ties, and calmed her scruples, set out on the untravelled path that lay before her, strong in faith and hope, though no doubt with tear-bedimmed eyes, gazing her last on the pleasant scenes so dear and familiar to her from childhood, her enjoyment of which

she now, with all else, freely surrendered to God.

Archbishop Murray did not allow his dear spiritual children to travel alone. He went with them to York, where they arrived on the 6th of June, the anniversary of the propitious day on which Mary Aikenhead had been received into the Catholic Church. Having given the postulants into the care of the good nuns at Micklegate Bar, he left them to pursue the important object for which they had come—the study of the principles of the religious life and the practice of its duties.

In her novitiate, Mary Aikenhead took the name of Sister Mary Augustine, while her companion chose that of Sister Mary Catherine, after the Saint of Siena, to whom she had a special devotion.

Every moment of Sister Augustine's time was now filled with occupations bearing on the work before her. She copied spiritual papers, translated books, and studied rules for the direction of religious communities. But the sense of responsibility, and the dread of being chosen Superior of the future community, still weighed on her spirits, and rendered her more uniformly grave than was natural to her. Nor were these her only anxieties at this time. She was much troubled about her sisters, who, some time before her departure, had left the convent school, and made their first start in housekeeping with their brother. They were not, it seemed, managing

money matters well, and were in danger of soon finding themselves in difficulties. She began to fear that she ought not to have left them alone, considering their inexperience. This doubt, as well as her other apprehensions, she communicated to Dr. Murray, who was always ready to aid her with wise and kindly counsel. He did not consider that she had any cause to blame herself. She had not taken the present step until her sisters were of an age when they might be supposed able to take care of themselves, especially as they were in the midst of a large family connection. He decidedly thought there was nothing in the circumstances to justify her in giving up the undertaking, if otherwise anxious to proceed. It would indeed have been strange for Mary Aikenhead to have abandoned her high project for the sake of two sisters in the world, one of whom was soon afterwards married, while the younger came of her own accord to live with her sister in Religion.

With regard to her other fears, Dr. Murray assured her that in "humble obedience there was the certain means of accomplishing the will of God," and that "there may be sometimes as much humility in accepting an office as in rejecting it."

"I share in all your anxieties," he wrote, "but my apprehensions are not as lively as yours. The work in which you are preparing to engage is the work of God, and He is able to make it prosper. It would certainly fail if it were to rest upon

human resources. . . . Distrust yourself, trust in Him; and you cannot fail. He in whose hand the moistened clay could restore sight to the blind, can make His frail, imperfect servant, if she be little in her own eyes, the powerful instrument of extending His glory."

Some time afterwards, an alternative was put before Sister Augustine, by Dr. Murray, which, but that her piety was too sincere and ardent, and her judgment too sound, might have offered a temptation to her thus to shield herself from the prime responsibility in the foundation. She was herself to decide whether the undertaking was to be home governed, and of native manufacture, or whether it was to be subordinate to a foreign Superior, and to be supervised in Ireland by Religious from abroad. She was for a time greatly perplexed, and sought the advice of the Reverend Mother, Mrs. Coyney, and Mother M. Austin Chalmers, the Mistress of Novices, on whose judgment she placed great reliance. They refrained, however, from any expression of opinion, and merely exhorted her to implore the guidance of Heaven. She begged that the community would join with her by the recital during nine days of the three last petitions of the Litany of Divine Providence. The request was more than complied with, orders being given for the daily recital of the entire Litany until the Irish Sisters should leave York.

Sister Augustine's doubts soon vanished. The

more earnestly she prayed, and the more carefully she studied the document which Dr. Murray had sent her from Paris, the clearer did it appear to her that many of the conditions would be impracticable in Ireland at that time, and others difficult of fulfilment and cumbrous. She understood from the tone of the Archbishop's letter that he was not prepossessed in favour of the *projet d'accord*. Having consulted with Sister Catherine Walsh, whose views coincided with her own, a joint letter, expressing their opinions and sentiments on the subject, was forwarded to Dr. Murray, and his reply showed that he was entirely of the same mind. The idea of making a foundation conformably to the *projet d'accord* with the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul was now quite abandoned, and it was agreed that a society should be formed which, though not *dependent* on that established by St. Vincent, should yet be united with it by the closest ties of charity, and partake as much as possible of all the spiritual advantages of this holy community. It was arranged that the work should be begun with the Rule the Sisters already followed at York, which had been approved by Pope Clement XI., and called "The Rule of the English Virgins." The Sisters' appreciation of it was increased from finding the spiritual advantages its practice had brought to themselves, and there appeared nothing in it that could clash with the exterior duties of charity which they had in view for the new institute.

Meanwhile, the year's novitiate had extended to upwards of two years; for at the close of the first, the Sisters, not feeling sufficiently prepared for the work, had earnestly petitioned for another twelve months' probation. By the time this was ended, events had occurred on the Continent which affected the position of affairs in Ireland, and rendered it impossible for Dr. Murray to undertake then the establishment of the new community. The Veto question had become more pressing than ever, and Dr. Murray was obliged to go to Rome as envoy on behalf of the Irish Bishops and people, Bishop Milner having already set out from England as joint delegate. His Holiness Pope Pius VII. had re-entered Rome, after his long captivity, on the 24th of May, 1814, and it was feared that the Papal Court, being under great obligations to the English Government, might be disposed to make some concession to the wishes of the Ministry, who, in return for the support given, asked for the power of veto in nominations to the Catholic Episcopate. The stay of the delegates extended to several months, and they had many audiences of His Holiness, but no very satisfactory settlement was accomplished on this occasion.

Dr. Murray, however, did not forget the future foundation, and seized this opportunity to obtain from the authorities at Rome all necessary faculties to establish the new community.

He had, besides, one great joy while at Rome.

The Bull for the restoration of the Society of Jesus was published on the 7th of August, 1814, and at a magnificent function in the Gesù the formal re-establishment of the Society was proclaimed. Dr. Milner had also the pleasure of being in the Gesù on this deeply interesting occasion. Among the sons of St. Ignatius assembled from many lands, the Irish Jesuits present were Fathers Esmonde, St. Leger, Aylmer, Butler, and Ferley, all of whom had made their novitiate at Palermo, in preparation for their life-long labours in Ireland.

CHAPTER VI.

RETURN TO IRELAND. FIRST CONVENT OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY.

ON his return home in February, 1815, Dr. Murray at once commenced preparations for the reception of the Sisters. A house in North William Street, built by the Trinitarian Confraternity for an orphanage, was offered to him for the nuns by the President of the Society, Mr. Christopher Elliot, in consideration of their taking charge of the orphans. This residence the Archbishop gladly accepted, enlarged it, and built a pretty little chapel, by means of funds principally supplied by Miss Matilda Denis, whose good works in Dublin are a perpetual monument to her memory.

It was in the month of August, 1815, on the octave of the Assumption, the titular feast-day of the future Order, that the foundress and her companion returned to Dublin, after a preparation of more than three years. They made their first vows on the 1st of September, and on the same day, Dr. Murray named Sister Augustine, Mother General, and Sister Catherine Walsh, Mistress of Novices. The first postulant, Miss Catherine Lynch, of Drogheda, arrived on the 3rd of

September, and from that day forward this little grain of mustard-seed, sown in Irish soil with so many cares, has not ceased to grow steadily in the parent stem, and to spread out its sheltering branches far and wide over the land.

Dr. Murray had only just seen the Sisters established in their new home, when, to their great trial and his own grief, he had to return once more to Rome. Before leaving, he placed the infant community under the special care of Father Kenny, S.J., who had arrived in Ireland from the south of Europe shortly after the death of Dr. Betagh, in 1811, and upon whom the mantle of the eminent Jesuit appeared to have fallen. Having blessed the chapel, and named the Rev. Matthias Kelly their chaplain, Dr. Murray departed for Rome on the 7th of September. The Rescript of Pope Pius VII. for the canonical erection of the Congregation was obtained by him at the close of the year, and reached Archbishop Troy early in January, 1816. As the documents may be of interest to some, the following translation of them is given :

Petition of the Most Rev. Dr. Troy for obtaining from the Holy See the faculty of instituting in Dublin the Pious Congregation of the Sisters of Charity.

“ Most Holy Father,

“ John Thomas Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, the most humble petitioner of your Holiness,

ardently desiring to obtain for the sick members of the flock committed to his charge the same offices of charity which the Daughters of Charity, instituted by St. Vincent de Paul, afford to the sick in France, presumes to lay with profound reverence before your Holiness his anxious solicitude, that a congregation of ladies devoted to similar works of piety should be established in Dublin. As, however, ladies living according to the rules prescribed by the said St. Vincent de Paul should be subject not only to the Mother General of the Sisters of Charity, but also to the Superior General of the Missionary Priests residing always in France, an arrangement which we could not adopt without the greatest inconvenience, on account of the difference of language, the distance of the places of residence, and other grave impediments, the said Archbishop, therefore, supplicates your Holiness to vouchsafe graciously to impart to him the faculty of erecting and instituting in the city of Dublin aforesaid, a pious congregation of ladies immediately subject to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Dublin for the time being, according to the rules of the nuns of York, whose rules were confirmed by the predecessor of your Holiness, Pope Clement XI., in his Constitution issued on the 13th of July, 1703, which begins, *Inscrutabile Divinae Providentiæ*—a fourth vow, however, being added of devoting themselves perpetually to the service of the poor.”

[The Answer.]

From an audience held on the 30th day of November, 1815.

“The above petition having been inspected, and the reasons therein adduced having been considered, our Most Holy Father Pius VII., by Divine Providence Pope, on reference thereto being made by me, the undersigned Prefect of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, has agreeably to the petition of the aforesaid Archbishop, graciously imparted to him the faculty of erecting and instituting in the city of Dublin a pious congregation or conservatory of ladies under the immediate jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Dublin for the time being, according to the Rules of the English Virgins approved by His Holiness Clement XI., of holy memory, in his Constitution, dated 13th July, 1703, which begins *Inscrutable*. He grants, moreover, to the said Archbishop the faculty of adding to the other vows to be taken by the virgins of the congregation, or conservatory, to be thus erected, a fourth vow, to devote themselves perpetually to the service of the poor; all things, however, which are prescribed by the said rules, and are compatible with the superadded fourth vow, to continue in force; for which let the conscience of the Archbishop remain charged.

“Given at the Palace of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, on the day and year above written. “L. CARDL. LITTA, *Prefect.*”

So occupied, however, was Dr. Murray with the affairs of the Irish Church, that it was not for some months after his return he had leisure to carry out the Rescript.

But much had yet to be done with regard to the Rule and Constitutions, and many and anxious were the prayers and deliberations. It was only gradually that these took definite shape, Father St. Leger, S.J., having the largest share in the final settlement.

It was on the 10th of September, 1816, that for the first time in Ireland nuns were seen in the lanes and alleys of Dublin, visiting the sick poor in their own homes.

In the month of November, Mother M. Augustine and Mother M. Catherine got notice to prepare to make their perpetual vows; the first vows—owing to the uncertain state of matters—having been only for one year. But the Rev. Mother always regarded the 1st of September as her profession-day, being fully determined in her own mind that even should the new foundation fail, she would enter some other Order devoted to the service of the poor. On the 29th, the little community, which now consisted of six members, went into retreat, Father Kenny conducting the spiritual exercises. On December 8th, the Archbishop of Dublin having previously sent to the convent the Act of Institution, Dr. Murray enclosed a copy of the vows to the Rev. Mother, with the following note :

“ Dublin, December 8th, 1816.

“ Dear Rev. Mother,—Enclosed I send you the form of your vows. At the end of the form the following conclusion may be written :

*“ In testimony whereof I hereunto sign my name.
Done in the Convent of North William Street, Dublin,
this 9th day of December in the year of our Lord 1816.*

“ SISTER MARY AUSTIN, called in the
“ world Mary Francis Aikenhead.

“ I intend to use my Roman vestments to-morrow, as the occasion is one on which I feel much exultation. I would like that you should make your vows in presence of the Most Sacred Host, and immediately before your Communion. I have asked Mr. Armstrong and Miss Denis to be present. When you communicate the form of the vows to Mother Catherine, tell her that I invoke a thousand blessings on her sacrifice, as I do so also upon yours. I hope to see you both before Mass. Adieu till then.

“ Faithfully yours in Christ,
“ D. MURRAY.”

At an early hour the next morning, Dr. Murray offered the Holy Sacrifice, and received the vows of the two Religious. Except for the presence of the two friends mentioned by him, the ceremony was strictly private.

Early the following spring, Dr. Troy obtained from Rome a grant of a special Indulgence for

the new Congregation, and soon after four postulants entered the convent.

Up to this time the Sisters had not assumed any distinctive costume, but merely wore a plain black dress and muslin cap. It was now necessary that they should adopt a religious costume, and the habit, since so well known as that of the Irish Sisters of Charity, was chosen without any ceremony. At the feast of Pentecost, the religious habit was assumed by all, except the postulants who had lately entered. In September, when two of the candidates were deemed fit to be admitted to the habit, the first public clothing took place. About sixty persons were present in the chapel on the occasion, and had the advantage of hearing the most eminent preacher of the day, Father Kenny, S.J., who chose for his text the words of St. Paul, "The charity of Christ urgeth us."¹ From that day the text of Father Kenny's sermon became the motto of the Congregation. Emblazoned in their chapels, engraved on their seals, and exemplified in their daily acts, are these animating words of the great Apostle, *Charitas Christi urget nos*.

Archbishop Troy, assisted by his Coadjutor, received the candidates. The ceremonial chosen for the occasion was that of the Hospitalières of St. Thomas of Villanova, Dr. Murray having brought a copy of it from Paris in 1815. The form, as he arranged it, is still used in the Con-

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14.

gregation. A few months after, the first public profession took place, when Sister Mary Teresa Lynch, the first who had entered the new convent, and Sister Mary de Sales Clinch, pronounced their vows. The ceremonial on this occasion also was taken from that of the Hospitalières of St. Thomas of Villanova.

This steady progress in spiritual life meant corresponding sacrifices and hardships cheerfully endured, which the heroic women who offered them never fully divulged to the world. The work daily increased, but as the community was not augmented in proportion, the strain upon each member was severe. There were the orphans to be looked after; there was the teaching in the poor-school, which was attended by a large number of children; and the external duties of visiting the sick took up much time. During the year now reached, 1818, the community was lessened by the death of two most useful and ardent members, Sister Mary Teresa Lynch, who died of a fever three months after her profession, and Sister Mary Magdalen Chamberlain. These first deaths, occurring so early in the existence of the little community, made a profound impression on the minds of all. And upon the Rev. Mother herself the impression was so intense and lasting, that after the lapse of thirty-three years, we are told, she could not allude to the subject without deep emotion.

The loss of two such devoted Sisters increased yet more the strain upon the others. Neither

had they sufficient domestic assistance. But Mrs. Aikenhead was indefatigable, and performed the duties of several offices besides her own as Mother General. Now that she was actually embarked in the work, all her apprehensions had vanished, and she was full of energy and courage, and equal to every emergency. Sometimes she was Novice Mistress in the place of Mother Catherine; she went on the sick mission abroad; whilst oftentimes hers was the hand which cooked the dinner also, and washed the stairs and corridors. The former was not indeed a heavy duty, as, on two days in the week, it consisted of nothing better than "stirabout."

An amusing incident is related of how, one day, when all the Sisters were out, the Rev. Mother set herself the task of scouring the stairs. She was in the midst of her work, with her long skirt pinned back, and a large checked apron covering her habit, when she was interrupted by a ring at the door. Descending instantly to answer the summons, she found that a distinguished prelate desired to see the Superioress of the Sisters of Charity. She at once showed the visitor into the reception-room, and retired, saying that the Rev. Mother would be with him presently. In a few minutes the apron was removed, the skirt let down, and Mrs. Aikenhead entered the parlour, to hold high converse with his lordship, who apparently never connected the hard-worked serving-Sister that had admitted

him with the dignified and elegant Mother Superior of the Order.

But, vigorous as was Mrs. Aikenhead's constitution, the tax upon her strength was too great. During the illness of the two Sisters, she had spent herself in constant attendance upon them, sometimes sitting up all night, and yet going on with her usual avocations during the day. Her own health now showed signs of breaking down, and the doctors who were consulted, ordered complete rest and country air. It was a severe blow to her to separate herself, even for a time, from the little community, and the work in which her heart was centred. But fortunately she, too, was under obedience, and when the ecclesiastical Superior added his fiat to the physician's advice, she had no choice but to go. The place selected was Rahan Lodge, in the King's County, a retired country seat of the O'Brien family, to which they gladly invited her.

It was one morning in the month of July, 1818, that Mrs. Aikenhead set out with her friends, travelling by the canal boat, or "packet," which sailed from Portobello harbour, just outside the city boundaries on the south side. This waterway, snail-like as was the progress, was a favourite mode of travelling in those days. It had the advantage, at least, that the passengers were sure to have a good view of the many charming scenes the country presented. The almost imperceptible motion of the boat was no

doubt soothing, and even the most nervous need have no fear of accidents of any kind.

Rahan, or "ferny-place," as the spot is named in Gaelic, had been a distinguished place in the bygone days of Erin's greatness. There had been a famous monastery there, founded by St. Carthage in the sixth century, and thither great numbers of students had resorted, not only from all parts of Ireland, but from Britain and the Continent. During the penal times, Mass had been celebrated in secluded spots in the neighbourhood, on great blocks of stone, while sentinels were posted around to guard the officiating priest and the congregation from the intrusion of their enemies. Truly, "the ferns were rooted in a sacred soil, and if the immemorial rocks could speak, strange tales might be revealed." Now, once more, the place was instinct with life—intense Catholic life, unobtrusive in its operation, yet steadily making itself felt—recalling past times and giving a fair promise of the future. The previous year, the Presentation Nuns had made a foundation at Rahan, and opened schools for the poor children of the neighbourhood; and shortly before Mrs. Aikenhead's arrival, the new College of St. Stanislaus had been established, where Father Kenny and his companions of the Society of Jesus were now busily engaged.

Mrs. Aikenhead's health soon improved in the fresh country air. This stoppage for a time in her work, which at first seemed a misfortune,

was far from being so in reality. The interlude proved of the utmost value, and most important results ensued. For it was during this period that the intimate association began—which extended over six years—between the Reverend Mother and the Rector of St. Stanislaus, Father Robert St. Leger, whom Father Kenny now introduced to her, knowing that she required advice and assistance on important subjects, and being himself too pressingly engaged to render it just then. In fact, Mrs. Aikenhead's mind was at this time very seriously occupied with the consideration of two most vital questions. The Constitutions, on which the welfare of the new Congregation so much depended, had not yet been formed. Also, she saw that the training of the novices must shortly be altogether undertaken by herself, the special vocation of Mother Catherine being for the sick poor, and she felt that she who had so lately been a novice herself, was scarcely prepared to discharge so responsible an office. To Father St. Leger she confided her grave anxieties on these points, and found in him a truly helpful friend and adviser. His first efforts were directed to forming the Rev. Mother herself, that so she might with confidence instruct others. For this object he spared himself no trouble, and not only by oral instructions, but after her return to Dublin, by a series of letters full of spiritual wisdom, he continued to guide and direct her.

The time and labour he devoted to drawing up the Constitutions shows what importance he attached to the work. He had found the base of the York Rule to be that of St. Ignatius, and the task he set himself was to construct a full and perfect code, in all points where conformity was possible, modelled on the system of St. Ignatius. He was very anxious that the Rev. Mother should share his own high ideas as to the great importance of the Constitutions. "Believe me," he wrote, "a love and veneration for your Constitutions is the great thing to be inspired into each member: their obedience to them will be in exact proportion to their respect for them. This attachment to their Rule was what held up the Society at all times as an object of wonder, and made them respect themselves so much that they merited the respect of others. May you never know the curse of religious persons differing in their opinion from their Constitutions. It is one of the points of manifestation; and it is directly and indirectly inculcated to the Mistress of Novices to teach her novices a love for their Institute and respect for its precepts. We were taught that our Constitutions are the essence of wisdom, and the Gospel put into the shape in which God would wish us to practise it."

It was feared for some time by many that the union of daily practical laborious work with the strict interior discipline and high spirituality which the Rule propounded, would be found too

severe a strain for the feminine mind to bear, however it might come within the scope of some Religious Orders of men. At one time, later on in the history of the Institute, an effort was actually made—to the great vexation of Mrs. Aikenhead—to change the Constitutions and render them less strict. But the crisis passed, though not without loss and pain. Mrs. Aikenhead always held to the opinion that Sisters of Charity need to be more spiritual than other Religious, to uphold them in a purer atmosphere and prevent them from contracting any grossness of idea amid the scenes they daily witness. Archbishop Murray, as well as Father St. Leger, decidedly took the same view. The result has amply shown that the high training of the Novitiate is calculated in an eminent degree to form the best types of women, full of noble self-restraint, with true dignity of character, and the gentle *reasonableness* which should distinguish Catholic Christians. Simple yet cultured in manner, they exhibit a breadth of mind, and in many instances a masculine understanding, which a course of logic and the study of the higher branches of learning may develop in women; but how often in these cases are the *spiritual* faculties dwarfed, and but half the nature is developed after all.

The passages which have come before us from the spiritual letters of Father St. Leger to Mrs. Aikenhead, are not merely beautiful and valuable in themselves, but the spirit they breathe was so

absorbed into the Rev. Mother's own being, and by her, in turn, infused into the Congregation, that they are on this account specially interesting. When at times she seemed discouraged by the difficulties that beset her path, his strong, hopeful words sustained and consoled her.

"We are not," he writes, "to give way to low spirits or sadness. Let not any interior trials affright you. Remember that you are not given up to be the sport of the enemy as he pleases to attack you, but that the strength, measure, and duration are fixed by God, and cannot be increased at the will of our adversary. Ponder this, and it will encourage as well as comfort you. Above all things be not disheartened; it is not alarming to fall into trivial faults, but it is truly alarming to be discouraged by them. . . . It is easy to be resigned when no cross rests on us—it is then easy to make generous offerings; but one act of contentedness at what God appoints when the chalice is offered to our lips, is worth whole months of the other exercise."

Speaking of perseverance in prayer, he says: "The little prayer of St. Ignatius is a most useful one.¹ . . . Do not, for the love of God, let disgust,

¹ The little prayer of St. Ignatius is as follows: "Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty—my memory, my understanding, my whole will. Whatever I have or possess Thou hast given me. Behold, O Lord, I restore all to Thee, and commit it wholly to the disposal of Thy will. Give me but Thy love and Thy grace. With these I am rich enough. I ask nothing more of Thee."

or what may appear insincerity in making these acts, be a motive for giving them up. Persevere, and God will not fail to impart a rich blessing of success on your exertions. Had Father de la Colombière permitted similar feelings to deter him from eliciting such acts, he never would have reached the height of virtue which now challenges our admiration. . . . You say that it is now your turn to *wait*, you that have been so long *waited for*, and in this humble disposition of soul which must bring down the complacent eyes of God on you, you brave the pains, disgusts, and difficulties you meet in the way of virtue. I scarcely wish, hope I cannot, that you, or I, or any one, can have things so much to our liking, or attended with so few disagreeable circumstances, as to falsify the Divine words, 'through many difficulties we must enter the Kingdom of Heaven,' but I shall never feel solicitous at your having something to suffer, at your experiencing discouragement, &c., when I see you make this suffering or discouragement a new incitement to union with and dependence on God. Read the twenty-fifth chapter, third book of the *Imitation*, and you will understand well my meaning."

Another time he thus writes: "You have much reason to thank God for the serenity of mind He has been pleased to bestow on you. May He, if such be His holy will, continue at least for a time the favour. . . . The life of a Christian is

an unremitting warfare, in which the hand of God may for a while ward off the blows of our adversary, yet His desire is that we often bear the brunt of the battle ourselves. Perhaps you have already experienced, at least occasionally, the truth of what I say, and had to contend with your former enemy. But do not lose courage; still make sacrifices to God, even though your heart belie your words, and you will feel your *will* to be strengthened in good, and peace return to your heart.

“I do not expect that your heart is so detached from things below, as that you can look with the same indifference on health or sickness, on comfort or dereliction, interior or exterior—life or death. But I see in you a spirit that will make you dear to Jesus Christ, and an object of complacency to the Court of Heaven; a spirit that animates you to give your heart, whatever it cost, to God, to check it in its desires for His sake, and in the spirit of His holy servants, to offer up not only its comforts, but even its wishes to Him in the perfect spirit of sacrifice. Your health will not admit the pious austerities of the saints, but it will not impede the crucifixion of the yearnings of the heart. Crucify the wish of better health, of comforts you do not enjoy, of being freed from evils you suffer; it would be infidelity to indulge them voluntarily, though it is impossible not to feel them; but they are sources of great merit. Believe me, that the

meeting every wish with a 'Receive, O Lord,' &c., in the spirit of annihilation of heart, will be more than a heroic act for your poor heart, and will be loading it with a cross heavier than the fasts and watchings of the ancient anchorites. Oh, teach it to love God alone, to be attached tenderly to nothing else: whatever you love, to offer yourself daily for the privation of it, whatever you enjoy, take it from Him with the same dependence. . . . My delight would be to behold you watching the pleasures and displeasures, the comforts and anxieties, the wishes and contradictions, in fine, every motion of your heart in order to offer it in the generous spirit of the little prayer of St. Ignatius. Ah! how little earthly dross could reside in the soul if chastened hourly by the practice of this holy exercise! And how little Purgatory would await the soul tried by such mortification! . . .

"You gave up worldly wealth, and for fear of attachment to it you now refuse yourself what is not necessary and keep nothing without leave. Strip your heart in like manner of its wishes, its desires, its affections, and keep none of them without leave of your Divine Spouse, Jesus Christ, who has taken the dominion of it. Do not say that this is an exercise of familiarity fit only for saints. *Sursum corda*, I say to you in the language of the Church, raise up your heart with confidence to God; seek without fear a devout converse and union with Him, and be

assured He will not repulse you. One of your victories must be over that pusillanimity which keeps you from seeking His conversation, and consequently from seeing that it has no bitterness or tedium in it, and which prevents you from reflecting that the heavenly words of the Redeemer were addressed, not only to His saints and Apostles, but even to Samaritans, publicans, and sinners, who enjoyed His sweet company and conversation, and were not driven away when they sought to be sharers in it."

After about two months spent at Rahan Lodge, Mrs. Aikenhead returned to the convent in North William Street, greatly strengthened in body and mind, to enter upon the responsible duty that awaited her of training the future members of the Congregation, and thankful that in the work she could count upon the kind support and counsel of Father St. Leger to help her on her way.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW FOUNDATIONS.

It is now time to say a few words about the Refuge in Ash Street, which Mrs. O'Brien and her friends had established. It had been removed to Stanhope Street in 1814, and the Sisters of Charity were now invited to make a foundation there, and take charge of the institution. The house was small, but there was room for building, and the same generous friend, Miss Denis, who had aided to build the chapel in North William Street, again provided a large portion of the funds for the necessary additions. The work had been already begun when Mrs. Aikenhead returned from Rahan in September, and it was vigorously proceeded with till its completion. She resolved to take this opportunity to accomplish the separation of the novices from the professed Sisters; a step Father St. Leger had strongly advised, and of which Archbishop Murray thoroughly approved.

In January, 1819, Dr. Murray announced his intention of sending some of the community to the House of Refuge in Stanhope Street, and shortly after, the Reverend Mother, with four

novices and three domestic postulants, entered on her office of Mistress of Novices in the new foundation. On the 2nd of February, the feast of the Purification, Dr. Murray celebrated the first Mass in the new chapel, and blessed the house, which from that date was called the Convent of the Purification. Before the end of the year, several young ladies entered the noviceship, not all of whom, however, continued.

Mother Catherine Walsh remained as Rectress in the first cradle of the Order at North William Street, and as it was now possible to extend the sphere of usefulness, the visitation of Jervis Street Hospital was soon afterwards begun, and was continued without interruption, until in future years the Sisters of Mercy undertook the entire superintendence of the Hospital. About the same time the Reverend Mother opened a Sunday School in Abbey Street, and the Sisters also undertook the religious instruction of the day schools there, which afterwards were removed to King's Inns Street, and under the Board of Education, entrusted to the Sisters of Charity.

In 1821 the Governor of Kilmainham Gaol requested Dr. Murray to allow the nuns to visit two young women under sentence of death, and Mrs. Aikenhead and Mother Catherine at once responded to the call. They were assisted in their solemn work of preparing the condemned by the Rev. Andrew Lubé, the parish priest of St. James's, and his curate, the Rev. William

Yore, and had the happiness of seeing the poor women truly penitent before the appointed day for their execution. At the request of the Governor the Sisters continued their visits to the gaol in favour of the other prisoners, until the solitary system was introduced, when they received notice to discontinue their visits.

The death of Archbishop Troy in 1823 called Dr. Murray to the see of Dublin. The following year the copy of the Constitutions which had been drawn up by Father St. Leger for Propaganda, was entrusted to the Rev. Walter Meyler, to get them confirmed at Rome; but as such matters are usually slow of accomplishment, it was not till some years later, that the friends of the Institute saw their desires actually fulfilled.

It is interesting to know that about this period the beautiful devotions of the month of May were inaugurated in Ireland, and were first performed in the chapel at Stanhope Street. But long before any book of the devotions appeared in English, Mrs. Aikenhead had got a translation made of an Italian work on the subject, and herself wrote out the directions for the proper observance of the exercises when performed in public.

From 1819 until 1826 Mrs. Aikenhead resided at Stanhope Street, and devoted herself to the training of the novices, whose numbers steadily increased. But this was by no means her only work. She also took part in the visitation and

relief of the sick poor, and the other external duties of a Sister of Charity. During all this time she enjoyed the blessing of wise and zealous counsellors and friends. Dr. Murray continued as warmly interested as ever in the welfare of the Congregation. Father Kenny was always ready, whenever possible, to render a service to the Sisters, and for several years the general retreat and triduum of the Congregation were conducted by Father St. Leger, who, much engaged as he was at his college, also managed to keep up the correspondence begun at Rahan with the Rev. Mother. Thus she had the great advantage while she instructed others, of being herself under the training of a master spirit. Her humility of mind was such, that at no period of her life was she above being a learner, and so she always was adding to her stores of knowledge—by no means inconsiderable at the first—and always had something fresh to impart.

Among the early band of Sisters of Charity there was great diversity of age and circumstances. Some were quite young; others had reached a mature age when they joined, and a few were widows, as Mrs. Corbally, a very zealous member, much beloved, who devoted herself particularly to the House of Refuge, with most useful results, and Mrs. Coleman, who held for many years an important position in the Congregation. Among those that entered the Novitiate in Stanhope Street, was the Rev. Mother's sister, Anne, who,

soon after the marriage of their sister Margaret to Dr. Hinkson of Killarney, decided to join the community. She was followed by her dear friend and cousin, Mary Hennessy, a lady who was a most valuable addition to the Congregation, and especially useful in the schools, being extremely well educated, and with a remarkable capacity for work.

Special interest attaches to the Cork foundation, for now at last the time had come when Mary Aikenhead was to realize her early dream, and found a convent of Sisters of Charity in her native city. During her novitiate in England, Mr. Timothy Mahony of Cork died, leaving a sum of money for a convent of the Order of Charity in the city. A still larger sum was contributed by the Misses Mahony, members of another family of the same name; but while the Congregation was only in the beginning of its work, and limited in numbers, the foundation had to be delayed. Dr. Murphy, successor in the see of Cork to Dr. Moylan, who had died in 1815, was very anxious that the project should be carried out, and in 1826 urgently renewed his request for some of the Sisters to be sent to Cork. The Archbishop acceded, and the necessary arrangements were begun. In September of the same year, Dr. Murphy came to Dublin, to accompany Mrs. Aikenhead and Sister Mary Regis Teeling to Cork, as they were to precede the rest of the community, and to reside in the Bishop's house

until the dwelling intended for the convent should be ready for habitation.

It was on the 25th of September, in the mellow glow of evening, that Mary Aikenhead saw again the city of her birth, and all the familiar sights which no doubt had often risen before her fancy during the years of her absence. There was the Mall, where she had so often walked, the shining river, on whose waters many a sail had been enjoyed; the parti-coloured steeple of Shandon Church upon the heights. There were many, both among the rich and poor, who had followed with eager interest the progress of her work, and longed to greet her on her arrival among them once more. But John Rorke, in whose cottage she had been cradled by her "Mammy," was determined that none should be before him with their greetings; and so he had gained admittance to the Bishop's house, and stood in the hall waiting to receive her. When the carriage stopped, and the house door was opened, the first face she saw on alighting, was that of her foster-father. In a moment everything else was forgotten. "Oh, Daddy John!" she cried; then throwing her arms round his neck, she kissed her dear old friend.

No less warm was the greeting which took place soon after, in Peacock Lane, between Mary Rorke and her nursling of long ago, whose baptism she had seen to, whose infant lips she had trained to the Rosary, and whom she lived to

see the foundress of a Religious Order. Poor Mrs. Rorke was now beginning to feel the infirmities of age. Afterwards, when she became quite invalided, she had reason to be thankful for the presence in Cork of the Sisters of Charity, who took the greatest care of her, pensioned her in her declining years, and tended her in her last illness. Mrs. Aikenhead always acknowledged her obligations to Mary Rorke, and was most grateful to her children for their attention to her.

“Tell my poor nurse,” she says in one of her letters, “that our Lord is leaving her a fine time to become a saint. She has also many blessings, and now at the last hour the Almighty Goodness has sent her support and comfort through your hands. Much better for her that I became a Sister of Charity than if I had been married. My children are of the right sort !”

The account of the house selected for a convent is distressing. It certainly was not chosen for comfort; probably its nearness to the Cathedral and presbytery, whilst being at the same time in the midst of the poor, determined the choice of it. Of no particular style of architecture, it was high, narrow and crooked, with ladder-like stairs, questionable roof, and insecure looking walls. There was no garden, nor even a good yard. The people called it a gayebo, and a rattle-trap. The Sisters, however, with a gentle irony, styled it amongst themselves, “Cork Castle.”

After a few weeks the domicile was ready for

occupation, and the little community, consisting of four nuns, one of whom was Sister Ignatius Aikenhead, arrived from Dublin. On the 13th of November, the festival of St. Stanislaus, the Blessed Sacrament was deposited by the Bishop in the little oratory of the convent, and the foundation of the Cork House dates from that day.

On November 19th, the feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the Sisters began the visitation of the poor in the north parish. The delight of the people to see nuns going about in their midst was mingled with wonder and admiration. They had various names for them, such as the *Walking Nuns*, the *Black Ladies*, the *Daughters of God*. It was a difficult time in which the Sisters began their work. Typhus fever was raging in the poorer parts of the town, and the visitation became extremely dangerous. The excessive wretchedness of the dwellings of the poor, and the want of proper sanitary regulations, made the disease epidemic; and for delicately-nurtured ladies to enter these abodes of appalling misery, and to breathe the stifling, pest-laden atmosphere while tending the stricken inmates, was a duty as trying and as meritorious, as any of those performed by the saintly Duchess of Thuringia herself.

Mrs. Aikenhead having organized the work, returned to Dublin early in 1827, leaving Mrs. Teeling as Rectress, with the four other nuns under her jurisdiction. But a great trial awaited

the community, and the Mother General in particular. Two of the Sisters were seized with typhus fever; the first who caught it recovered, but the second—Sister Ignatius Aikenhead, never got over the effects of the disease. She gradually sank into consumption, and after eighteen months, died at the convent in Stanhope Street. She seems to have been of a singularly sweet and gentle disposition, though strong to renounce all the attractions that the world offered her, and to dare everything for the sake of the suffering poor of Christ.

The calls on the Cork community rapidly increased. The instruction of the sick in the North Infirmary was committed to them, and at the Bishop's request they took charge of the religious instruction of the penitents in St. Mary Magdalen's Asylum. The visitation of the South Infirmary and another hospital was soon afterwards added. They taught catechism in the Cathedral, and opened an evening class for children preparing for first Communion. A class for adults was also formed, which was attended by a large number of the soldiers of the garrison, who needed instruction in their religion. Some of their Protestant comrades asked permission to come too, which was granted, and the result was, that several of the men were received into the Church.

Though the community had been increased by the arrival from Dublin of Mrs. Coleman—who

afterwards became the Superior—and a lay-sister, the work was still, as may well be imagined, almost more than could be responded to. They had many difficulties to contend with, and the deficiencies of "Cork Castle" were very serious. The administration of financial affairs was also sometimes no easy matter, but their greatest trial was when they were without the means of helping the poor. Mrs. Aikenhead, however, taught them that when they were powerless to help, they were to share abjection and privation. "Sisters of Charity," she once said, "are not to gain Heaven, without suffering with, as well as for, the poor."

But they were never left without frequent striking proofs that Providence was watching over them; and sometimes sums of money came unexpectedly from anonymous donors when the case was becoming specially urgent. The gifts of one of those anonymous benefactors amounted to a regular annual income of £100 for thirty years.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHOLERA VISITATION. REVEREND MOTHER INVALIDED.

THE next important event in the Congregation was the establishment of free schools in Upper Gardiner Street—a work for which the Archbishop had long been anxious. For some time it had been evident that the house in North William Street, though it had done very well for a beginning, was no longer suited for a convent of Sisters of Charity. The accommodation was quite insufficient for schools on an extensive scale, and the charge of the orphanage interfered with the important duties of the sick mission. It was decided, therefore, to give up the place to a community of Carmelites who offered to take the orphans into their care.

The funds required for the erection of a new convent and schools had been supplied some years before, through the death of Dr. Everard, in 1821, who bequeathed to Dr. Murray a sum of £4,000 for that purpose. There had been difficulties, however, about obtaining a suitable site, so that the work was not begun till 1827. As it was desirable that the Carmelites should

take possession of the William Street premises as soon as possible, Mother Catherine and her community after a time moved to a house on Summer Hill, while waiting the completion of their new convent.

In 1830 the Sisters entered on their enlarged sphere of labour in Gardiner Street. The principal management of the schools was committed to Sister M. Xavier Hennessy, who had a special talent for teaching. For some time the work was particularly difficult and trying, as, owing to the want of Catholic schools, most of the children were totally unused to order and system of any kind, and the rest had been in the habit of attending sectarian institutions, where, being warned by their parents against the religious instruction, they had imbibed a suspicion of their teachers, and now were unable to distinguish the difference. At first the nuns found all their efforts unavailing to manage the noisy little mob that crowded the rooms. But at length, with the kind assistance of the Christian Brothers, whose help they were advised to ask, order was produced, and from that time the schools flourished, and were an invaluable boon in the neighbourhood.

In the course of the following year, Mrs. Barbara Verschoyle, who had established a poor school at Sandymount, persuaded Mrs. Aikenhead and four Sisters to remove there, and thus to commence a fourth foundation of the Order of

Charity in Ireland within sixteen years. Though the convent was small, its acquisition just then was a great blessing. For some time Mrs. Aikenhead's health had been declining. Over-exertion of mind and body had brought on inflammation of the spine, which wrong medical treatment rendered chronic, and no hope of any restoration remained except in perfect rest and removal into country air. Thus it appeared as if the Reverend Mother's labours were at an end. Such would have been the case with most others; but it was really only the beginning of Mrs. Aikenhead's most important *spiritual* work. Another providential result was her introduction to a physician, Dr. Joseph O'Ferrall, who not only became her personal friend and adviser, but an important ally and instrument in the most momentous of all her achievements.

Not long after the Reverend Mother had been left, a complete invalid, at Sandymount, an occasion arose which brought the new Congregation, under trying and terrible circumstances, more directly before the world than had hitherto been the case.

In the spring of 1832, Asiatic cholera appeared in Ireland, and the plague first broke out in Dublin. The city was ill-prepared for such a visitation. As has been already said, the poorer quarters were crowded with a population sunk in indescribable destitution and misery. The Archbishop at once issued a pastoral exhorting

the people to great temperance, cautioning them against holding wakes, and urging all who should be attacked to go at once to the public hospital prepared to receive the cholera cases. There, he assured them, they should find all that would tend towards their recovery, should such be the Divine will, and if death were to be their lot, all the consolations which the Church could supply would be afforded them.

The Sisters also, continuing as usual their visits at the homes of the sick-poor, endeavoured to persuade those who found themselves attacked to go to the hospital. But their efforts were often in vain, until a request came to Archbishop Murray from the public authorities, that the Sisters of Charity should visit at the Penitentiary in Grangegorman Lane, which had been converted into a cholera hospital for the occasion. The call was willingly responded to. A number of the Sisters in the Stanhope Street Convent, some of them only novices, were chosen for the mission, and Mother Catherine Walsh, with two of her community, came from Gardiner Street to join the heroic band and be near the hospital, which was just in the vicinity of the convent.

It must have been a hard trial to the energetic spirit of Mrs. Aikenhead to be chained to her couch during this time, shut out from any share in the labour and the danger, where she would otherwise have been the first. But she had her own especial work, that of directing and counsel-

ling her children in the awful crisis that had occurred; and as the circumstances of the mission were somewhat different from those they had been accustomed to, she addressed to the Sisters engaged in it a letter of instructions regarding both practical and spiritual matters.

“The peculiar intention,” she wrote, “of our revered prelate on this occasion, namely, that by our attendance in the hospital we should tranquilize minds suffering from the effects both of agonizing disease and false terror, will be most effectually met by perfect composure of countenance and manner while treating with the poor sufferers, and also by great simplicity in the manner of instruction. In the present case lengthened expositions or explanations of the Articles of Faith and detailed examinations of conscience should be entirely avoided. The sentiments you should be most careful to excite in the poor sufferers are implicit faith in all that our Holy Mother the Church teaches, *because God Himself has revealed it*; unbounded confidence in the Divine mercy; acts of Divine love; perfect charity towards all mankind; humble compunction for sin; and unlimited resignation to the most just and holy will of God, especially with regard to the present infliction of His Providence and its ultimate result. The frequent repetition of the following little prayer in a gentle tone of voice, but repeated distinctly and

solemnly, will excite in the dying the dispositions principally required: 'O my God! I accept of death as a homage and adoration which I owe Thy Sovereign Majesty; as a punishment justly due to my sins; in union with the Death of my dear Redeemer, and as the only means of coming to Thee, my beginning and my last end.' This, with a devout invocation of the Holy Mother of God and St. Joseph, is form long enough considering the circumstances of the malady. The prayers of the Church for the agonizing should be recited by all at home during the time of evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

"One word I have to urge regarding the public recitation of prayers in the hospital (and I do so most earnestly) is, that it be made more solemnly, and *much* more slowly than is the usual custom amongst Ours. Believe me, my dear Sisters, this is a point of no small importance for general edification. All who have ever heard our Archbishop recite English prayers, have had the opportunity of copying from a perfect model.

"I need scarcely observe the necessity of peculiar attention to exterior deportment. This should be equally removed from any degree of forwardness, and from any *undue* appearance of disinclination to hold such communications as the medical gentlemen or other officials may seem to desire. It will probably be appointed that you visit the hospital in your religious veils; if not, I request that all lay aside their crape

veils before they enter the wards; let them be folded and put in the pocket. It is not according to the spirit of our Institute that we should appear in any exercise of its functions with our faces veiled like Carmelite nuns.

"These are a few of the ideas which have struck me on the present occasion, and I communicate them to you, my dear Sisters, in the pleasing conviction that they will be received with the same sentiments with which they have been penned. Earnestly entreating your prayers, I remain, my very dear Sisters,

"Your affectionate Mother and Sister in Jesus Christ,

"SISTER MARY AUSTIN AIKENHEAD.

"Convent of the Sisters of Charity,

"Sandymount, 28th April, 1832."

The visitation of the hospital was at once begun. The Sisters attended in their religious habits; for no difficulty had arisen on this point. They were at the hospital about eight o'clock every morning, and remained until night, returning only to the convent in the middle of the day for dinner. They had a fearful experience. So rapidly did death carry off its victims, that frequently eight different occupants of one bed succeeded each other in the course of a day. Each morning the list of the dead posted at the hospital gates numbered from fifty to eighty names, and the scenes among the crowd that

constantly collected, as one after another read the name of a near relative, were distressing to witness. The Sisters were amply assisted in their duty of consoling the sick, and preparing the dying for their sudden call into the presence of God, by the chaplain, the Rev. L. Parsley, but the swift progress of the disease left little time for immediate preparation.

In the mission, Mother Catherine Walsh should be specially mentioned. She was indefatigable, and allowed herself no rest. Such an occasion as this brought the especial qualities she possessed into full requisition. But all were unwearied in their exertions to relieve the poor patients; and their zeal, and total disregard of personal danger, made the greatest impression on all who witnessed it, and won for them the respect and warm admiration of many not previously disposed to regard nuns in a very favourable light. Only one among the Sisters took the contagion, and she recovered, and in a few days was again at her post in the hospital.

During three months the plague raged unremittingly, and the Sisters of Charity continued their labours of love. It was not till the end of 1832, that the cholera disappeared from Dublin. But in 1833, a lesser visitation occurred, and the disease prevailed so much in the neighbourhood of Sandymount and Irishtown, that Mrs. Aikenhead collected subscriptions, and opened a temporary hospital at Ringsend, where the patients were

attended by members of the Sandymount community.

In the meantime, the Cork community were passing through a similar ordeal, and in some respects a yet more severe one. The panic and terror were greater than in Dublin. The deaths were so fearfully numerous, that the people lost all confidence in the doctors, and regarded them with violent antipathy. They could not be induced to go to the hospital when attacked by the cholera, though the Sisters, at the request of the Bishop, went about from house to house in the lanes and alleys, endeavouring to persuade them. This being the case, the only thing that could be done was to follow the example given in Dublin, and bring the Sisters of Charity to the hospital. Dr. Bullen, the only Catholic among the doctors, was deputed by the others to wait upon the Sisters, and request their attendance. The result was as hoped for. When it became known that the "daughters of God" were at the hospital, the objections of the people at once vanished, and they not only were found willing to go, but when there, submitted with the confidence of children to the directions of the Sisters, which the doctors often tried vainly to enforce. When a dispute sometimes occurred with the relatives of the dead, owing to delay in delivering up to them the remains, which were occasionally detained for *post-mortem* examination, the appearance of the Sisters of Charity alone could control it,

and restore peace ; and oftentimes it was only in their wake that the doctors could safely pass to the hospital. The task of calming and consoling the friends and relations of the dead and dying was by no means among the least difficult duties of the Sisters. The hospital was surrounded all day by an anxious, half-frantic crowd, whose excited feelings, each time that the door opened, to admit a new patient, or to carry out the dead, found vent in loud wailings, that could be heard a great distance off.

The labours and devotion of the Catholic clergy of the city during this sad time were untiring, and foremost among them was the Rev. Francis Mahony, "Father Prout," a son of Mr. and Mrs. Martin Mahony, the constant benefactors and friends of the Cork community. During the worst period of the visitation, he scarcely ever left the cholera hospital. Many a conversion to the Catholic Church took place on the bed of suffering or of death. For the poor stricken Protestants who lay there had none to give them spiritual aid ; their own ministers, both in Cork and Dublin, with one solitary exception, it appears, having declined to attend the cholera patients. And when they saw those around them consoled in their last agony by the ministrations of the priests and Sisters of Charity, it was not strange they should think that the religion which prompted its professors to such deeds of self-sacrifice and mercy,

would afford them the safest transit to the next world.

The cholera continued longer in Cork than in Dublin, and though it seemed at times to pass away, it was not till 1834 that the cholera hospital was finally closed, and the terrible visitation was completely ended. It was followed by wide-spread destitution, and great and general efforts were made to relieve the distress of those who had lost by death the relations that had been their support. In all these good works, the Sisters took an active part, much of the management and distribution of relief being committed to them. Subscriptions had been obtained, and a large number of poor widows and others were provided with baskets containing a variety of small articles, that thus they might establish an itinerant trade, and earn a livelihood.

From 1831 to 1835, Mrs. Aikenhead remained, completely invalided, at Sandymount. In accordance with Dr. O'Ferrall's directions, she was obliged to be almost continually in a reclining position, and only went out occasionally in a little vehicle, to visit the convents and other places where her presence was necessary. But on her return, she had always to lie down at once, and remain on her back for hours. Her sufferings during this long period were a continual martyrdom, both from the weariness of constantly lying in the one position, and the severe pain she endured in the spine. When at last she was

allowed to sit up, it was not much relief, and she was obliged to have a small cushion placed between the shoulders to support her head. "I cannot stand," she wrote, "without intense pain, nor move without suffering more than any one can know. All this from the back; and when fatigued, the head becomes badly affected. Otherwise, I am considerably better." The extraordinary patience and genuine cheerfulness with which she bore the heavy cross laid upon her was in itself a valuable lesson to all around her. She would not allow the time of the Sisters to be taken up with more attendance on her than was absolutely necessary, and, whether she ever felt it or not, never complained of loneliness. Her love of books was a great aid to her, and afforded her that occasional relief so needful in her forced inactivity, from the burden of cares which otherwise might have pressed too heavily upon her mind. When about to be left almost by herself in the convent at one time, she wrote: "Do not suppose this will be any trial to me. I can read all day, and all the long evenings of winter, with the greatest ease, and very few enjoy reading as I do." Her reading was generally of a very solid nature, such as not every one could have appreciated. Among her favourite books were several of the large, substantially-bound and beautifully printed volumes of one or two hundred years ago. Such as the *Histoires des Ordres Monastiques, Religieux, et Militaires*, printed in Paris, 1714; the

Œuvres Spirituelles, of Guilloré, 1684; the *City of God*, in quarto, and an old edition of the *Letters of St. Augustine*, whose writings she had for many years delighted in. Occasionally, however, when she allowed herself an interval of real recreation, she read a good work of fiction, and she was quite familiar with Sir Walter Scott's novels.

She usually took the most hopeful view of her own case, and often would say she was better when others could see little improvement in her condition. She never watched her symptoms with undue interest, or let her physical state absorb her mind—the bane of so many invalids, which sometimes becomes their worst malady. Her mind was too strong for this, her religious principles too high, and her interest in large concerns too genuine and keen to be diverted by any merely personal distresses. “I am certainly so much better as to general health,” she writes to one of the Sisters, “as to be able for application of mind without any injury, and also I can enjoy all that goes on; but above all, I have to thank God for a temper naturally cheerful. My spirits are good, and even when unpleasant matters, or difficulties, occur, experience has taught me the necessity, but above all, the *comfort* of following St. Ignatius’ great principle, ‘To do all as if there were no one but ourselves to act (that is, to do our very best with fervour and perseverance), and to look for the result as entirely depending on God.’” Another time she writes: “I am quite

fairly, and up for anything that can be done—lying down.

A really supernatural work is perhaps often hindered by too much physical activity; and it would seem, in Mrs. Aikenhead's case, as if Divine Providence wished to show that in proportion as physical freedom is restrained, does spiritual influence extend itself. At all events, one of the most remarkable features in her life is the fact that what would have brought an ordinary person's career of usefulness to a close, was the very thing which formed the basis of the Reverend Mother's greatest undertakings. Confined as she was to her room, and often her bed, for weeks, and months, and years, Mrs. Aikenhead governed her Order by her pen; deepened the spiritual life in it by her own sufferings, and instructions to others, and seemed endowed with inexhaustible energy and hope in opening out works of charity in every direction. So long as she was herself overwhelmed with exterior work, and leading a life of constant unreprieve, it was impossible she could become the fountain of living water to others. Divine Providence altered all that by chaining the Mother General to one spot, whence all her children might derive sustenance and guidance.

Others might be the hands and the feet, she was the *heart* and *soul* of the Congregation. In the letters written at Sandymount, which were the first of a long series continued in other

places, she spared herself no trouble ; in some of them entering into minute directions about charitable projects, or domestic affairs—for nothing of this sort was beneath her notice—in others, treating of the most deeply spiritual subjects. In one of her letters at this time, she speaks of the kind of members most needed by the community. “You well know,” she says, “how necessary it is for our work to have *head, heart, and hands.*” She was herself an eminent example of the union of practical, intellectual, and spiritual qualities in the one person. As a rule, the tone of her letters was especially serious ; yet sometimes, when writing to those whom she might think needed to be cheered as well as advised, they were relieved here and there by a playful touch, or glimpse of humour. But whether practical or spiritual, or flashing forth stray sunny gleams, in all of them the strong sound sense and warm heart of the writer were discernible. Although most of her letters were written while lying down, or at great cost of pain and weariness if she sat up, the hand was clear, and the punctuation well attended to.

A constant correspondence was at this time kept up between Sandymount and Cork, where Mrs. Coleman, though young in Religion, held the responsible post of Rectress, in the absence of Mrs. Teeling in Dublin. As postage was high in those days, the letters were generally conveyed in a hamper that travelled by a little steamer, and

brought an exchange of provisions from one convent to the other; some articles, such as butter, eggs, being cheaper in Cork, while others, of a different nature, were more plentiful, and better in Dublin. Presents for feast-days were also frequently sent in this way. How much the gifts from Cork, especially the eggs, were valued, may be gathered from this passage in one of the Reverend Mother's letters: "You see," she says, "we have a real treasure of a zealous, unmeddling, kind chaplain here, who hears the great big men's confessions before and after breakfast; so he is worth a good egg. And I promised Dr. O'Ferrall's very amiable, nice old mother, that the Reverend Mother would keep her in eggs for his breakfast. She loves him as her life. No wonder!"

During the trying period of the cholera visitation, the following letter was addressed to Mrs. Coleman:

“✠ Convent of the Sisters of Charity,
“Sandymount, June 3, 1832.

“My very dear Sister and child in Jesus Christ, —I am not quite sure whether I shall be able to write very much at present, but I cannot allow the opportunity to pass without thanking you for your letter, and still more for your love of the duties of our dear Congregation, and your efforts to be faithful in the share of labour which has been allotted to you. But, my dear M. Chantal, it is our good God to whom both you and I

should be grateful on this subject. And we have much to thank Him for, even for these little drawbacks on our comforts and conveniences, especially experienced by our dear Sisters in Cork. May all and each endeavour to deserve a continuation of His best blessings, and of those special graces which are necessary for the attainment of that perfection which He has called us to practise. Of little avail will be all our exertions in behalf of our suffering fellow-creatures, if each act does not flow from the interior spirit of *genuine charity*. The indispensable characteristics of this you will learn from that portion of St. Paul's Epistle which is read on Quinquagesima Sunday. This should often be the subject of consideration and interior examen with Ours on retreat days; for if *we* cannot prove to ourselves the existence of those *domestic virtues* which are *alone* its *infallible marks*, we must apprehend that zeal for exterior duties is not that genuine zeal which constitutes solid virtue. We may exercise much of what will obtain the applause of human understanding, but with very much of this we should be like the foolish virgins with empty lamps. These are subjects of serious consideration, but we must have courage. 'He is faithful by whom we are called,' and, my dear Sister, how small are the deeds by which, if accompanied with purity of intention, perseverance, and fervour, the religious soul can amass treasures of merit before God.

“ I hope that each of us will, by prayer and self-examination during this holy time of Pentecost, invite the Holy Spirit to visit her heart, and teach her what is faulty in her soul. We have very many helps to become interior and perfect Religious, and if we do not avail ourselves of them, ourselves are blameworthy. Our precious rules of the Summary teach us the virtues which we are required to practise, and also assist us in gaining them. Let us remember the caution which his eminent experience in spiritual life urged St. Ignatius to give his followers, ‘ In their spiritual duties to beware of the illusions of the enemy.’ One is assured that by frequent reading of the Summary we get the letter of the rules impressed on our memory in a manner which leads certain dispositions to stop there, and to remain as unmortified in their own will and judgment, as if there was no 12th rule to help them to observe those of obedience ; as irritable and reluctant to be laid aside or reprehended, as if there was no 11th rule to encourage them to a close imitation of Him who by His Incarnation came down on earth to teach poor corrupt nature the treasure of true humility. We read the rules, it is true, but alas ! with how little practical fruit. If we remembered the 13th of the Summary, would Superiors find so much difficulty in getting the less honourable duties of our religious servitude performed, or, if we were inflamed with the full spirit of the 19th, should we not be more

amiable, more useful domestics of the household of the faith? It is very certain that we should constantly in prayer, and in the days of recollection we are allowed, study the full spirit of the *Illuminative* portion of the Summary; it is only those who do so that will be able to observe those regarding the vows, and those statutes of domestic discipline contained in the common rules. Industrious occupation, silence, conformity to God's holy and just appointments in the trial of sickness and at the hour of death, will not be conspicuous in any others than in the interior, humble, and mortified Religious. Do, then, my dear Sister, pray, and get all our dear Sisters (to each of whom, I beg, my most sincerely affectionate remembrance) to pray that we may each and all aim steadily and fervently at this most desirable end. . . .

“Ever, my dear M. Chantal,

“Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

“SISTER M. A. AIKENHEAD.”

In January, 1833, the Congregation made its fifth foundation by taking charge of the Penitents' Asylum in Townsend Street. The credit of originating this institution is due to two persons in humble life, Mrs. Bridget Burke, and a man named Quarterman, who began the work by organizing a penny collection, and procuring respectable lodgings for the poor women they hoped to reclaim. The pious project succeeded

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so well, that at length they found themselves in a position to hire a house for the reception of the penitents, who were employed in washing and needlework. After a time, the superintendence of the institution was undertaken by a zealous and clever lady, Mrs. Ryan, a niece of Dr. Troy, then Archbishop of Dublin. Under her management, it became exceedingly prosperous, but since her death it had suffered greatly, both as to general order and financial condition. The Sisters of Charity had no easy task to perform when they took charge of it; but Sister Francis Magdalen MacCarthy, Superintendent of the House of Refuge, Stanhope Street, and one of the most valuable members of the Congregation, was appointed to the work of reorganization, and, in spite of difficulties, most satisfactory results were soon accomplished.

It was in this year, 1833, that the Constitutions of the Congregation were confirmed, from which circumstance it is a memorable one in the annals of the Order.

CHAPTER IX.

ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL.

FOR many years Mrs. Aikenhead had cherished the project of founding a great hospital in Dublin, where the sick poor should be tended by Sisters of Charity, and receive all the aid that medical skill could afford. And now, when the Congregation had been in existence for nearly eighteen years, a way seemed opening before her. The first help towards carrying out the enterprise was the gift of £3,000 from Sister M. Teresa O'Ferrall, for the purchase of a suitable house. The next important step towards the accomplishment of her desire was the acquaintance of the Reverend Mother, with the able and charitable physician whose co-operation was so valuable in the establishment and conduct of the hospital.

With her usual keen insight Mrs. Aikenhead had at once recognized the qualities of her physician. She saw that he was possessed of energy as indomitable as her own. She knew that his religious principles were strong and sincere, and his heart warm and kind, despite a somewhat cold exterior. He had had many difficulties to contend with in early life, all of

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which he had bravely overcome, and by his own exertions and talent, had steadily made his way to a foremost place in his profession. His father, a Catholic by birth, occupied a humble station. His mother belonged to a Protestant family of high position; but she had lost everything by becoming a Catholic, and, young and beautiful as she was, had been turned out of her house by the uncle and aunt who had hitherto idolized her. This led to her introduction to the humble but worthy young man who became her husband. The story is an interesting one, but cannot be entered into here. Ardent love for his profession, and attachment to his widowed mother, were the two great distinguishing points of Dr. O'Ferrall, and his ambition from his youth was to place her in a position equal to that which she had renounced for conscience sake. Mrs. Aikenhead admired and esteemed his steady, earnest character, and as her acquaintance with him progressed she spoke of her plans about the hospital, and was cheered by the warm interest he evinced, and the promise of all the aid in his power.

Matters being now in a fair way, Mrs. Aikenhead began to consider how she might get some of the Sisters trained, to enable them to undertake the management of the new hospital. She was anxious that they should, if possible, go to Paris, and study in one of the great institutions there the system of the *Hospitalières*

of St. Thomas of Villanova. Before long this was arranged, and the Archbishop departed for Paris to leave three of the Sisters at the "Hospice de la Pitié." After they had been there for a while, the Reverend Mother thus writes to one of her correspondents :

"The Sisters in Paris are going on quite to our satisfaction, and are very happy. They find truly affectionate mothers and sisters, whose piety and laborious zeal are most edifying—so is their charity and attention to Ours. That Congregation of St. Thomas (they are called *Les Filles de St. Thomas*) has forty houses throughout France, most of them attached to hospitals. In all the hospitals they are supported by the government or the magistracy of the place, and this most liberally. Poor Ireland ! "

A year had been fixed on as the term of the Sister's stay in Paris. In the meantime preparations were being made in Dublin; and as the former town-house of the Earl of Meath, in St. Stephen's Green, was for sale, it was decided to purchase it for the new hospital. Possession was taken of the premises on the 23rd of January, 1834, the feast of the Espousals of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, and the Archbishop celebrated Holy Mass in the fine drawing-room of the mansion. Although the house was in good condition, some alterations were needed to fit it for its new purpose, and as the community were to inhabit the upper rooms—the ceilings of which

were low and garret-like, it was necessary that the roof should be taken off, in order to give the required height. This work occupied some months, and was not completed when the Sisters returned to Dublin, on the feast of St. Aloysius, the 21st of June, 1834.

As frequently happens in new undertakings, as if to try the mettle of those engaged in them, Mrs. Aikenhead at first met with many disappointments. She did not receive as much help and sympathy from without as she had expected; yet the establishment had mainly to depend on the favour of the public. Under the influence of these discouragements she wrote to her correspondent in Cork, Mrs. Coleman:

"Only this day have I been able to determine on a plan for the commencement of the hospital. To yourself alone, I freely say that we have not, or seem not to have, any one but the Almighty Himself to aid us in this great undertaking. Such coldness from all as would surprise you! . . . This was commenced on Monday, and I really had not time *for you* since. Indeed, my dear child, I can truly repeat the sentence with which I finished on that day. And this want of support, this falling away of every one is a trial to me. But *all, all* is far from proving that the good work is not His, by whose assisting aid we can do all things.' What I want is that you will pray."

In her next letter she thus writes:

"I am angry with myself for telling you of my

feeling so much embarrassment, but it will induce you to pray the more earnestly. Since I wrote I have submitted a prospectus to our venerated Archbishop, which, approved of, we shall get printed and sent a-begging. On this score we should pray. . . . Say a Hail Mary, St. Joseph's Collect, and those of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Francis Regis, for our aid in this collection. All the efforts of the 'old fellow' cannot have power if we deserve the Divine aid. So on we will go, trying to be very good. Teach those around you that it is by fidelity in our religious observances, by fervour towards God, fraternal charity among ourselves, and zeal in our exercises for the relief of the poor, that we can alone obtain what we seek. We have four patients in the house, but assuredly no great accommodation as far as appearance goes. We only took them in to bring the Divine blessing on us, but not for show ; so they have every comfort, and visitors pass by the room without knowing they are in it. Give my affectionate remembrance to all, and also to poor nurse."

After a time affairs became more satisfactory, and she has some good news to communicate to her friends :

"Report will perhaps tell you of our having received a legacy of £5,000 left to the hospital. I learn from our venerated Archbishop that there is a prospect of £1,000. It is a great deal, in fact, but you know how little in comparison to our

wants. However, do you, as I hope we have done, thank our Lord for His favour."

Several subscriptions also came in from various persons, and some friends contributed a few pounds to purchase linen for the new hospital. The Rev. Mother's spirits soon rose, and she set to work to cut out and prepare the various articles that would be needed, making many of them altogether with her own hands, as she reclined on her bed in Sandymount.

As soon as the alterations in the Stephen's Green mansion were sufficiently advanced, Mrs. Aikenhead and three of the Sisters went to reside there. Three rooms only were as yet fit for habitation. One of these was occupied by the Reverend Mother, who, though much better—thanks to the skill of Dr. O'Ferrall—was still an invalid. The second was fitted up for an oratory, and the third, a very spacious apartment, was all that remained for the three Sisters, and it had besides, to serve as kitchen, refectory, and community-room.

Matters now went on fairly well. The Marchioness of Wellesley, a Catholic, and of Irish descent, who was in Dublin—the Marquis being now Viceroy for the second time, showed great favour towards the new hospital, and endeavoured to obtain for it the patronage of Queen Adelaide. But in this she was not successful, and the prospectus had to be printed without the distinction of Her Majesty's name. Copies of

this document, which was entitled: "Prospectus of an Institution intended to be established in Stephen's Green, Dublin, by the Sisters of Charity with the concurrence of their founder, the Most Rev. Dr. Murray, Catholic Archbishop of Dublin," were extensively circulated. Many were the comments that the enterprise called forth. Some thought it an imprudent undertaking, others considered it unsuited to the state of Religious. The majority, however, gave their sincere sympathy and approval, and regarded with admiration the noble-minded woman to whose courage and exertions it owed its accomplishment.

In April, 1835, the institution, under the title of St. Vincent's Hospital, was opened, with twelve beds for female patients. These were soon filled, and as the number of applicants increased the Reverend Mother opened a second ward, and shortly afterwards a third, and then a ward for children. Accommodation was thus provided for forty patients. Dr. O'Ferrall, who was appointed first physician to St. Vincent's, nobly lent his aid by constant gratuitous attendance, and for the first year had no assistance in his laborious work.

The following year preparations were begun for opening a ward for men, by throwing down the stables in the rear and thus obtaining ground for a fine building, containing in the basement a good extern hall, a consulting-room, and a post-mortem room, also a convenient pharmacy; and above, a large airy ward, with accommodation for eighteen

or twenty patients. The Reverend Mother alludes to this addition in the following letter :

“The three thousand pounds of which I told you we got the first payment of interest, is a sum secured by legal deed in the bank, expressly for *our* hospital. This gift of Divine Providence is certainly an animating assurance of the special aid of Him, whose miracles do not cease to support the charities of this great city, although not in such abundance as to allow us to cease in our exertions or our prayers. We must in gratitude praise the Almighty Mover of hearts, for many and unexpected little aids, as well as for the greater supports.

“We are, as I told you, preparing for a sermon on the feast of St. Patrick, and are also preparing to open our male ward under his patronage. The new ward will be called St. Patrick's, and will hold eighteen beds. We shall then have fifty-two beds; but for all this we require great aid. . . .

“I shall certainly make every effort to see Miss H—— when she comes, and assuredly it will give me pleasure to have every in and out of our institutions seen by her. The more they are looked into the better. Is not that a bold assertion? It is, however, very true. Of course we know that prejudiced persons see nothing right, but to any person really sincere, and of just conscience, we are anxious to expose all.”

St. Patrick's Ward was opened on the feast of the Assumption, 1836. The number of beds was afterwards increased to sixty, and with this progress Mrs. Aikenhead had to be content for a few years, as there seemed no means of further enlargement.

In 1841, however, the house next to the hospital, belonging to the Marquis of Westmeath, was for sale, and the Reverend Mother at once decided to devote to the purchase of it a sum of money which had been placed at her disposal by Sister M. Lucy Clifford. Adjoining the house was a magnificent banqueting-room—the scene of many a brilliant revel in the days before the Union—which Mrs. Aikenhead longed to see peopled now with the sick poor of the city of Dublin. The plan was to connect the two houses, but the design was difficult of execution, and many complications arose in attempting to carry it out. The work was suddenly put a stop to by what seemed at first a great misfortune. The Sisters in the hospital were awakened about two o'clock one morning by four terrific claps, like loud thunder, and it was found that the entire four stories of the next house had fallen. But though the front house was in ruins, the banqueting-room and the ball-room remained uninjured. Mrs. Aikenhead was in Sandymount at the time, and it was feared she would take the disaster greatly to heart. But the Reverend Mother had never thought much of the plan for connecting

the two houses; yet knew that any suggestion to take down the edifice would have met with disapproval; so that when Providence did it for her, she was not very deeply concerned. "Now proper plans can be made, and all done as it should be," she said, with her usual love of *perfection*, as far as possible, in everything.

Of course funds were needed, for there was little in hand for the work. But subscriptions soon flowed in, and the supplies did not fail until all was satisfactorily accomplished, at a cost of about £8,000. It must not be supposed, however, that the means were obtained without great exertions on the part of the Reverend Mother and her community, assisted by a few kind friends. Bazaars were held in aid of the hospital, charity sermons were preached, and notices and petitions sent out—an arduous business in itself. "Only think," writes the Reverend Mother, "of our kind friend, Mrs. O'Brien, having actually directed every letter at her own house."

One of the best friends of the Sisters of Charity about that time was Daniel O'Connell, who showed a great interest in St. Vincent's, and never failed to take advantage of any opportunity to render it a service. The Reverend Mother was a warm admirer of O'Connell. In a letter of the year 1843, she writes: "Our extraordinary patriot is increasing in the admiration of all. His letters and speeches seem to have assumed a tone of dignity befitting the oratory of a patriarchal

patriot. Man unaided could scarcely have run the wonderful course we have witnessed. Quietness reigns, and we must continue to pray our best."

Mrs. Aikenhead's love of her country was very warm and sincere, and also rational and just. She knew well, and grieved over, the great sorrows and trials of the people, and was always ready to make excuses for those short-comings in the poor, which wrong and oppression had brought about. And as she pitied the individual sufferers, she pitied the land itself, so beautiful and full of capabilities, yet, through centuries, never allowed to lift its head. But ardent and deep as was her patriotism, she was too just and generous to permit any limitations to her sympathies in the exercise of her beneficence. She regarded all who were in trouble as her neighbour, and she was always anxious to soften the rancour of national and party animosity—so high at that time—by every means in her power. The second physician whom she appointed to St. Vincent's—Dr. Bellingham—was a Protestant, and a member of a specially anti-Catholic family. Protestants, as well as Catholics, were made welcome to her hospital, and she never refused them the attendance of their own ministers. It was truly repaying evil with good, and doing to others, not what they did, but what we would they should do to us. For Catholics were still very largely the objects of great intolerance and unfairness in many respects.

About October, 1834, while Mrs. Aikenhead was busy preparing for the opening of St. Vincent's, a request was made to her by Dr. England, Bishop of Charleston, who was over from America, to make a foundation in his diocese. But it was not in her power to undertake a foreign mission. "I could have wished we were to labour in that vineyard," she wrote to one of her friends, "but to send any of our present members out of Ireland, would have been false zeal. We have not enough for the arduous duty we have already undertaken." Finally, the Ursuline Nuns agreed to send out some of their community with the Bishop, to found a convent in Charleston. As they passed through Dublin on their way, Mrs. Aikenhead had the pleasure of seeing once more some of the friends of her youth, who were of the missionary party.

Three years after the establishment of St. Vincent's, an urgent request came from Dr. Polding, Archbishop of Sydney, and his Vicar-General, Dr. Ullathorne, to send out a small colony of Sisters to New South Wales. Mrs. Aikenhead was at this time in a better position to comply; but as the Congregation does not oblige its members to go on distant missions, she merely informed the Sisters of the proposal, and caused to be read in all the houses of the Congregation, a pamphlet written by Dr. Ullathorne, giving a harrowing account of the degradation and misery of convict life in Australia,

and dwelling on the extreme need of such workers as the Sisters of Charity, who by their influence and instruction might effect a great change in, at least, the female portion of the convict population. Five Sisters offered themselves for the mission; and having been generously provided by the Reverend Mother with all requisites for their work, and everything that could tend to their comfort and convenience during the long voyage, they embarked at Gravesend on August the 18th, 1838, in charge of Dr. Ullathorne. Paramatta, then a penal settlement, was to be the scene of their labours, and there they arrived at the close of December. The funds for the foundation had been provided beforehand by Dr. Polding and Dr. Ullathorne, assisted by the charity of some friends of the mission. When making his application, Dr. Polding had explained that no thought was entertained of the home institute providing support for the Sisters. The idea was, to form a separate Congregation, as the distance from the parent stock rendered it impossible to remain under its government.

The undertaking was eminently successful. Soon after the arrival of the Sisters of Charity an important charge was committed to them—the care of the children of the Catholic convicts, who were under the protection of the Government. Many other undertakings followed. Within a few years a hospital was founded, a Magdalen asylum, and schools, the care of which, with

their many other duties, must have involved a vast amount of work for a small community. But one of the duties dearest to the hearts of the Sisters was their attendance on prisoners under sentence of death; and many who but for these gentle ministrations, would have met their fate in hardened unbelief, died with words of humble faith and hope upon their lips. And so, though confined to the one spot herself, Mrs. Aikenhead had the great consolation and joy of knowing that the seed sown by her hands had now grown into a flourishing tree, which had sent out a hopeful offshoot, to gather within its shelter the wretched and forsaken at the utmost part of the earth, and would continue for generation after generation its vivifying influence—blessed and scattering blessing around—long after her death.

CHAPTER X.

THE MOTHER GENERAL. VISITORS TO ST. VINCENT'S.

FROM 1835, up to about 1845, Mrs. Aikenhead generally resided at St. Vincent's Hospital. After a time she recovered sufficiently to be able to go through the wards, and sometimes descend to the reception-room. She is described about this time as a most elegant-looking woman, whose majestic bearing and sweet benignity of countenance well expressed the qualities that made her both revered and loved by her children, and gave her such an extraordinary influence over all who came in contact with her. All her views were broad and generous, yet prudent. She did not very often express an opinion, but when she did so, it always showed her clear judgment, and was very rarely found to be mistaken. It was no wonder that the most eminent and distinguished persons should consider it a treat to converse with her, and frequently found their way up the long ascent to the Reverend Mother's apartments in the upper story of St. Vincent's. Her early general reading, and the stores of various kinds of knowledge and practical experience she had gathered since,

together with the charm of her manner, made her conversation most interesting and attractive. Full of variety, it was at one moment deeply serious, at another quaintly expressive, or taking a sudden humorous turn. All felt that they were in the presence of a powerful and strongly individualized character; a truly remarkable woman.

We learn that she was very generous about monetary affairs; and with regard to the dower of those seeking to enter the Congregation, was far from exacting, if she thought the family were straitened in means. But otherwise she was inflexible; as any compromise in that case would have seemed to her a robbery of the poor, and equivalent to cheating God out of His right. Her mode of action towards everyone with whom she had dealings was open and genial. Even in the least concerns her greatness of soul, and her indifference to worldly opinions, was apparent. Her character was peculiarly free from any of the small or petty traits so often found mingled even with the highest qualities. She took a great interest in the workmen employed by her, and would inquire into the circumstances of their families, and see that the children were sent to school, and given a fair start in life. To those of a higher class—the friends of the Congregation and others—she frequently rendered services. Helpfulness was one of her great distinguishing points, and not a few had their path cleared from difficulties through her means.

She was always very anxious that the poor persons who came to her convents on business should be kindly treated, and would have them invited into the kitchen to rest, and receive refreshment. If they were employed on a message to another convent, she would send word that they were not to be allowed to leave without their dinner. She could not bear to have the poor tradespeople of the neighbourhood cut down in their charges, or that any one should try to get things what she called too cheap. The animal creation shared in her kindness of heart, and she was as particular that the cat got milk as that breakfast was served in the refectory. We are not surprised, indeed, to learn this. Those who are benevolent towards human beings are almost invariably found to be considerate of the brute creation also. It was a characteristic of some of the greatest saints. The instance of St. Francis of Assisi is known to every one; and it was a trait of St. Philip Neri.

She was fond of children, and on special occasions, particularly her own feast-days, would send an order to the schools for a holiday and treat for the children. If any of them were in disgrace at the time, and about to be punished, she would beg them off. She was very kind to the young members of the Congregation, if they were in fault, and if she knew it was not deliberate; and had a pleasant, half-humorous way sometimes of administering a reproof. Her

love of *truth* was intense, and she particularly encouraged straightforwardness in the young Sisters. "A deep sense of truth, without quibbles," she says, in one of her letters, "we should be careful to require in every candidate of both classes. Try that all of Ours should discriminate between artful and real simplicity. And observe that years will not give experience in any class." Another time she writes: "I wish we could teach folk the importance of simplicity. Truth suffers always from any deviation from beautiful simplicity. . . . May we learn to love the naked truth, and only hate sin, and pray for those we have reason to complain of."

Her skill in analyzing character and her strong practical sense prevented her from being easily deceived by any one. She had a particular objection to erroneous ideas of recollection that interfered with the proper performance of ordinary duties; and as she was most exact herself that everything she undertook, whether small or great, should be done to the best of her ability, she required the same attention in those under her. Those who did careless or stupid things, with the idea that they were cultivating piety, were her special aversion. "We want young women who have sense and know how to use it," she used to say. She taught her nuns that perfection consists in doing our ordinary actions in a perfect manner, with the full bent of the powers of the soul.

"I don't like people who always look down," she once said to a lay-sister who had charge of the halls and parlours. "Look up, child," pointing to the ceiling, from which a large cobweb hung. "And now, my child," added the Reverend Mother, "if you looked up more to the heavens, you would do your work in a more perfect way for God." It is to be hoped that the cobwebs were better looked after from that time.

She was always pleased to see some degree of enthusiasm and fervour in the Sisters, but discouraged fussiness. "My child," she said, one day, to a young Sister who was in a state of excitement about one of the patients in her charge, "you would want to carry about a priest in one pocket and a doctor in the other." It was her delight to see the Sisters going about the wards, busy and cheerful, attending to the sick-poor. Noticing a Sister's anxious countenance, she would say: "Have you too much to do, my heart? I am afraid the yoke of the Lord is getting too heavy for you. God loves the cheerful giver." To another she would say: "Are you happy, my heart? Yes? Well, then, you must be good. Do *you* now try to make others happy also."

One of her most striking characteristics was her perfect conformity to whatever was ordained by Heaven. For the spirit of the Rule, which especially fosters such an attitude, had been thoroughly assimilated by the Reverend Mother.

One of her dearest children who happened to be with her on an occasion of severe trial to the Congregation, relates that by no word of censure towards those who were the cause of the trouble, or the slightest act of any kind, did she give evidence of the anguish she was enduring at the time; only occasionally the murmured words: "O my God, not as I will, but as Thou wilt;" or "*Fiat fiat!*" escaped her lips.

Reliance on Divine Providence was another prominent feature in Mrs. Aikenhead's character. If funds were low in any of the institutions, and it seemed almost impossible to support them, she still did not like the Sisters to be extremely anxious. "Why distrust the sweet Providence of God by wanting to have more than we actually require for present use?" she would say. At the same time she did her utmost to make funds, and with the first few pounds that came in her way, helped the Superiors of the needy institutions to replenish their empty purses, and so carry on their pious work and have the means of relieving the poor. It has been said that she sometimes declined to make new foundations. It is true she was not rash, and never undertook a new branch of charity until she had members to work it properly and a reasonable prospect of sufficient means to support the community. But where a foundation had already been made, she was always most reluctant to give up, and used every exertion to avoid doing so. In a letter to the

Superior of one of her houses, the following remarks occur on the subject of foundations :

“I must now refer you to our holy institute where mention is made of foundations. A house with proper title-deeds, rent free and furnished, or an equivalent, besides maintenance for four members, is considered a foundation; except where all this exists our present circumstances will not admit of our even thinking of forming a community. You are fully aware that such was the settlement required by us in the very commencement, and you are fully aware how much experience has taught us since, regarding the wisdom of attending to the very letter of our statutes of government. . . . We cannot, by our statutes, go anywhere on uncertainty; and the proposition of withdrawing at the end of a year, we could not at all enter into. We cannot go as *adventurers*; and truly I could give some items of the consequences of such proceedings as would deter authorities from encouraging such. We have all our duties clearly defined and established by the Holy See, and must act in conformity.”

During the latter time of Mrs. Aikenhead's residence at St. Vincent's, her sufferings became much increased, and frequent attacks of bronchitis were added to her chronic malady; but she was always uncomplaining and cheerful. “How are you to-day, Mother?” she was asked one morning, when ill, by one of the Sisters. “Ah, how could I be, my dear child,” she replied, in

her pleasant style, "but like a crock that you may have seen in the country tied up with cords and kept together by careful handling. Only for the charity and attentive care of our dear Sisters I should long since have come asunder."

Another time, when unable from ill-health to attend daily Mass, she was asked if she did not feel it a great privation.

"Oh, yes, child, the very greatest," she answered; "but I'll tell you how I sanctify it and occupy my thoughts during Holy Mass. First, I reflect how unworthy I am of being present at the great Sacrifice of Calvary; therefore it is right He should call on me to make the greatest sacrifice I can offer Him. Then I solace myself by going in spirit to each of our convents, and uniting at each altar with the great Victim who offers Himself to His Eternal Father for us poor sinners. And I think with humility of the condescension of the great God, in making use of *me*, so weak an instrument, to procure His Divine Majesty so much glory. Oh, pray, child; I ought to be a saint!"

As Mrs. Aikenhead's great work at St. Vincent's progressed, and it gradually became the great school of medicine which it is at present, her visitors of various kinds became very numerous. Some came to consult her on business of importance; others were distinguished strangers who wished to see the hospital, and, if possible, the Mother General herself. She sometimes found

the receiving of them all a rather wearisome duty. "I really think," she writes, "the new staircase must be very much easier than the old—so many folk make their way up to me; and little visits, although seemingly all on business, are a sad drawback to me—moreover, a wearisome task by the time of dinner."

Among her visitors in 1839 was Dr. Wiseman—not then Cardinal—who came to Dublin to preach in the new Church of St. Andrew on the day of its consecration; and of course wished to see St. Vincent's and the Reverend Mother. His cousin, Mrs. MacCarthy, was at that time Rectress of St. Vincent's. He was much attached to her, and there was considered to be a striking likeness between them. The pleasure which this visit must have been to Mrs. Aikenhead no doubt made up for the fatigue she sometimes endured.

Another visitor, of a different description, was Dr. Pusey, who found conversation with the Reverend Mother so absorbing that on one occasion, it seems, his visit extended to two hours. Mrs. Aikenhead was deeply interested in the Oxford movement, and well able to discuss it in all its bearings with Dr. Pusey. As he expressed a wish to witness a religious profession, Mrs. Aikenhead invited him to be present at the ceremony in Stanhope Street. This was an exception in his favour, to her general rule, as she did not care to have non-Catholics present on these occasions, though she often invited them

when a postulant received the habit. We do not learn how Dr. Pusey impressed the Reverend Mother; but his character, however she might appreciate some points of it, was hardly such as to gain her admiration; and his inability to see facts or reach conclusions other than he desired, was very far removed from her own clear-sightedness in all things. It would be interesting to know whether the Reverend Mother ever met Dr. Newman; but during the time of his stay in Ireland, 1854—59, Mrs. Aikenhead was not residing at St. Vincent's, and was advanced in years, with increasing infirmities. His name, however, was inscribed in the record of donations to St. Vincent's Hospital, and he sometimes said Mass in the chapel while Rector of the Catholic University.

One who was afterwards to satisfy his desire for self-abnegation in the Religious life—Gerald Griffin—came also from time to time to visit his sister, who was a novice at St. Vincent's, and to see the Reverend Mother. Sister Mary Baptist Griffin intensely loved and revered the Mother General, and on the first occasion that her brother met Mrs. Aikenhead, she was very anxious to learn what he thought of her. But the author of *The Collegians* was in a wayward mood, and instead of the burst of enthusiastic praise she had hoped for, all he could be got to say was, "She'll do." It is certain, however, that he did really appreciate the Reverend Mother, and he

had already made known his opinion of the Congregation in his poem, *The Sister of Charity*. Mrs. Aikenhead had a great regard for Gerald Griffin, and his works had a place in her book-case.

Among the medical students attending St. Vincent's Hospital was another poet, who, deeply impressed by the pious labours of the Sisters, and recognizing the beauty and nobility of their mission, gave utterance to his sentiments in verses equally beautiful, though perhaps not so widely known as those of Gerald Griffin. But the majority of readers of this biography are no doubt well acquainted with the poem of Richard Dalton Williams, beginning :

Sister of Charity ! gentle and dutiful,

This poem was read in court when, in 1848, Mr. Williams, as one of the proprietors of the *Irish Tribune* newspaper, was tried for treason-felony, and his counsel, Mr. Samuel Ferguson, had to defend him from the charges of socialism and infidelity. The jury, though by no means predisposed to be favourable, returned a verdict of not guilty. Mrs. Aikenhead took the deepest interest in the young poet, and when he afterwards went to America, was always pleased to receive letters from him.

While at St. Vincent's, Mr. Williams, at the request of the Sisters, made a translation of the *Stabat Mater* for a *Manual of Prayers*, which

Mrs. Aikenhead wished to bring out for the use of the Congregation. It was a commission he was at first rather reluctant to perform. "Clarence Mangan tried it the other day and utterly failed," he said. "Never mind Clarence Mangan," replied the Sister who had charge of the matter. "And, besides," continued the poet, "one should be very holy to do *that*; a man should get himself into a particular frame of mind for that sort of work." "Exactly so; but is not that just what we want you to do?" suggested the Sister.

His objections being thus overcome, the translation was made. The *Dies Iræ* and the *Adoro Te Devote* were also translated by him, and inserted in the *Manual*; and an original poem, "Teach me, O God," was written for the Sisters by Mr. Williams, and first appeared in their little hymn-book.

CHAPTER XI.

DAILY OCCUPATIONS. TRIALS.

IN 1843 Mrs. Aikenhead had the opportunity, though on a sad occasion, of again meeting a former dear companion, Mrs. Lynch—Sister Ignatius—of St. Clare's Convent, who had been suffering for some time from a dangerous and painful disease, and came to stay for a while with her old friend, Mary Aikenhead, and try the benefit of Dr. O'Ferrall's treatment. In a letter to the Rectress of the Cork community Mrs. Aikenhead announces the arrival of this guest :

“I cannot write long, yet I must tell you of an unlooked-for circumstance. We have here with us Mrs. Lynch of Harold's Cross. . . . Yet I fear it is over-late. I was not aware of the extremity of the symptoms until Tuesday last, and had a request from our venerated Archbishop, as soon as His Grace was informed of the state of this long-trying and faithful servant of the poor, to hope we could manage to receive her, and try what the success of the Divine blessing may effect by her treatment at St. Vincent's.”

In a letter dated the eve of the Ascension, the

Reverend Mother alludes to her own delicacy of health ; and again speaks of her guest :

“ I must avail myself of the first moment in which I could write to you. So, unless the holy feast has sent you direct to take your place in the heavenly mansions, I shall beg of you to unite poor heavy me in your ardent petitions, that we may prepare fitly for receiving a plenitude of those divine gifts, which will not be denied to true Religious, and true penitents, in the approaching great and holy feast of Pentecost. We have need to pray, and to labour, and to suffer, for these are days of trial. As to my attack of influenza, it was not slight, and proved very tedious. Now I am in my usual way, with plenty to fill up more time than my infirmities allow me. If I am only faithful in the space granted to me it will suffice. Of course we want prayers; but I am induced to ask for charitable aid, for my old and truly edifying friend from St. Clare's Convent, who, I think you are aware, has been with us, in the hope of averting the painful disease of cancer, if it be the Divine will to spare her longer, even in her present state of delicacy (for that very painful malady is not by any means in an advanced state in her case). It seems to all informed on the subject, that her life being prolonged is calculated to be of advantage to the community of which she has been an efficient member. *Fiat voluntas tua.* Amen. It is the wish of our dear and venerated Archbishop, in accordance with the opinion of

our physician (Dr. O'Ferrall), that she should remain a while longer at St. Vincent's."

After a sojourn of some months at the hospital, Mrs. Lynch returned to her convent, considerably benefited by the medical treatment and tender care she had received; but her life was spared for only three years longer, and in 1846 she breathed her last.

During this time Mrs. Aikenhead's health did not permit her to visit often at the Novitiate in Stanhope Street. But candidates for admission were always seen by her, previous to their entering the Noviceship. The young Sisters were often employed at St. Vincent's before their profession, so that the keen eye of the Reverend Mother had good opportunities for observing their fitness, and testing their dispositions. She allowed nothing defective to pass that could possibly be amended in them. Her mode of reprehension, as has been said, was usually very kind, occasionally enforced with an apt illustration, or word with a humorous turn; but always, with something so impressive in the manner, that it was rarely ineffectual. On occasions, however, she could be severe, and administer a rebuke in no sparing terms, which she was pleased to see had its effect, though at other times it distressed her to see any of her children in tears. "Did you meet N.N.?" she once inquired of a Sister who entered her room. "Yes, Mother, she seems in great affliction," was the reply. "I fear I did

“speak to her severely,” said Mrs. Aikenhead. “Oh, I am sure you did, for she is breaking her heart crying.” The Reverend Mother did not look troubled at this, as the Sister half expected. “I am glad to hear it,” she remarked, quietly; “God loves a heart that is easily made to bleed. He can readily imprint His own Divine characters on it.”

Though she disliked excuses, she was always pleased, if a genuine explanation could be given, to hear it, and once commended a young Sister very warmly for just telling simply how a thing occurred, when she had been blaming her for what seemed like great carelessness. “You are a good child,” she said; “come over and kiss me. Another would have left me all my life under the impression that she really had been guilty of that culpable indiscretion.”

A character possessed of the strong individuality of Mrs. Aikenhead's, could hardly be without some noticeable faults. Her fault about this period of her life was a certain impetuosity, and hastiness in reaching conclusions. This struck those who had known her in youth, when *gentleness* was one of her chief characteristics, and many who had not seen her for several years, found it hard to identify the Mary Aikenhead of former days, with the august Mother General, whose commanding presence and tone of authority, never failed to enforce obedience. But if ever she was mistaken or hasty, she was equally prompt

to call herself to account, and would make amends in the most touching manner for any error or impatient word that might have caused pain to another. In later life all her natural gentleness returned to her. There is no doubt that any departure from it in middle-life was due to physical causes—the acute spinal irritation she constantly suffered, and the severity of the remedies used for her relief, which affected her nerves, so that any unexpected noise, such as the slamming of a door, sometimes caused her almost intolerable pain.

Her letters about this time show how constant were her occupations, and how numerous the interruptions she had to contend with. She thus writes to a Sister at a distance who was engaged in an important work:

“Indeed I am mortified, when I think how long a time has elapsed since you had a line from me, and I fear the great multiplicity of our occupations has not allowed time for any other to give you news of us. My dear child, your letter written during the Triduum, afforded me the most sincere consolation, as it assured me that our Lord has granted you the best of all good gifts, next to a lively faith—I mean self-knowledge. Like all other graces, your own effort to correspond with it will continue to increase the gift, and bring with it the graces of succour in your difficulties and temptations. You know it would be a sort of presumption to say, “I can do

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all things in Him who strengthens me," if you were to omit the necessary exertion on your part. Your character requires not so much the exercise of disengagement from creatures, as a steady effort to die to self. Be assured of it, self-love is the source from which all our trials derive their bitterness." . . .

"Here, my dear child, is the thirteenth interruption; and believe me, only actual interruptions—and no want of true and tender affection and interest for you—have interfered to oppose my writing. I have been haunted with anxious apprehensions about your anxiety at not hearing from any of us, and I hoped my being confined to bed with a cold, but not a bad one, would be the means of allowing me full time to write to you."

She goes on to give her correspondent a glimpse of affairs at St. Vincent's, and then, with her usual love of remembering anniversaries, tells her to be sure to keep a little list of all their particular days. "The 29th will be the foundation day at poor old Stanhope Street. I went thither from North William Street on that day in 1819, leaving all the professed Sisters, namely, Mother Catherine and two more, and taking with me just four novices, we having lost by holy deaths our two eldest professed Sisters the year before; so that our entire number was eight living members. I hope we may continue to deserve the Divine blessing, and go on for the time to come, without making less progress, in Divine

love and active service of the poor members of Christ, our Lord. Oh! may we each day and hour improve! To-morrow will be the feast of the Most Holy Name. Let us pray for each other, that it may be deeply engraven in our hearts; the precious fruit will be, that each will labour more earnestly to imitate her beloved Lord and Spouse, and to promote His greater honour and glory." . . .

"As I ask for a treat]" (for the school-children, on her birthday), "I must enclose the price in the shape of a half sovereign. And as I am certain Mary Lucy, and perhaps Mary Xavier are about to write, I shall not be anxious to tell you more news; and in great haste a letter can be only chit-chat. The Christmas collection for St. Vincent's amounts to one hundred and one pounds, besides ten pounds of a legacy paid on Thursday, and nine pounds, the produce of a raffle. A baby-house was purchased by Mr. Thomas Mulhall, brother to our esteemed Rev. chaplain; he exerted himself, and we had no other trouble or expense. The raffle took place in our great hall. . . . We are already at work for the bazaar. I have got a pair of very beautiful screens hand-worked by a dear little cousin of mine who is in town—alas! a steady Protestant—birds in raised work, two on each screen, on branches of trees done in chenille."

Mrs. Aikenhead liked the Sisters to employ themselves in any leisure moments with a piece

of fancy-work for the lotteries and bazaars undertaken for the different charities. "Ask yourselves," she writes to one of her communities, "whether there is any little thing you could do during the winter evenings for the bazaar for the House of Refuge. Our Sisters tell me there is not a nun even in the hospital (in Paris), who has not a piece of work always in hands, either in carpet or lace for the Altar. It is surprising how much embroidery and other work is got through."

During her residence in St. Vincent's, Mrs. Aikenhead celebrated, in 1840, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Irish Sisters of Charity. She thus writes to one of her children: "As a little commemoration of the first quarter century of the existence of our dear Congregation, I have to send you the first volume of an Ecclesiastical History of our own dear Ireland, and the second shall be sent when published. Truly we are the successors of eminent saints, and we ought to know and emulate their virtues." Two years later she kept the fortieth anniversary of her reception into the Church, and that of her First Communion on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul.

At this time and afterwards, Mrs. Aikenhead had a good deal to do with printing. She brought out translations, compilations, and new editions of standard works, for the use of her communities. The particularity she showed about paper, type, and binding was characteristic of her.

She could not bear that anything should be done in an inferior or unworthy style. The following passage from a letter written in 1843 refers to the different publications :

“I saw Mr. Brown since you wrote, and he seemed disappointed by your not sending the manuscript of the Novena. He seemed quite up to our publishing it. I rather understood you to say *you* had not given up the hope ; so may our Lord prosper all to His greater glory ! Already I have had cash for eighteen copies, and twelve copies of the forthcoming fifth part of *Nonet* ; may our Lord speed that also ! I shall look for an opportunity to forward you a copy of a most interesting work, the *Notes of Cardinal Pacca's Ministry, and of His Holiness Pius the Seventh's Capture and Captivity*. We have had it for some years in French. Now it is really well translated by our good friend and benefactor, the Hon. Colonel Southwell ; by whose Preface you will find that the profits are intended for St. Vincent's Hospital. Now, the truth is, that if London printers and booksellers so manage as to return anything in the shape of profit, it will be rather marvellous. However, the *intention* and *attention* of our benefactor are not the less to be valued. . . . I am sure you will be much interested by Cardinal Pacca's book. Inquire whether the Rev. M. O'S— has the work in Italian ; if not, this English translation he will find by far preferable to the French. Have you heard any

one speak of our Rev. Dr. Miley's work, *Rome as it was under the Pagans, and as it became under the Popes*? The subject is truly interesting, and the style most justly admired. This is an expensive book: twenty-four shillings, two vols.; but I can give you a lend. I had a most complimentary note from the Rev. author, with a copy."

The *Meditations of Père Nonet*, mentioned by Mrs. Aikenhead, were translated from the French by Father M. O'Sullivan of Cork, and the profits of the sale were given for the charities carried on by the Sisters. These meditations were from that time adopted for use in all the convents of the Sisters of Charity. The Reverend Mother says of them: "How truly instructive, consoling, and in every way admirable I find the meditations, I cannot well express! I hope we shall have the great comfort of seeing the invaluable work completed. Above all, may we each derive the profit to be obtained!"

In 1844, Mrs. Aikenhead had her likeness taken; and thus alludes to it:

"Just have spent a great deal of very precious time sitting for my portrait, and also sitting with Mrs. O'Brien, who has consented to get hers taken for us. Then our dear, holy Archbishop condescended to give us a portrait of his venerated self. The artist is an Irishman of very considerable talent. He resides in London, but comes to his mother and sisters for a month or so each year. He is very young—twenty-five. All

declare that there never were such likenesses—your old *madre* looking *young*. I think our countryman will make a great name. Judges tell me he is the first artist that has appeared in Dublin, and will rank at the head even in London.¹ Dear, dear Ireland, how my heart rejoices and glories in all her excellences!”

The warm and affectionate nature of the Reverend Mother made her feel very deeply the loss of any of her old friends. The following extract is from a letter in reply to Mrs. Coleman, who wrote to tell her of the death of a dear friend of her youth, Dr. Bullen of Cork; not wishing that the announcement should first reach her through the public papers:

“My dear Mother Rectress.—Most sincerely I thank you for writing as promptly as in your power. May I be ever grateful to Almighty God for His great mercy in behalf of my oldest and most dear friend! And had I only learned the demise of my truly excellent friend by the papers my sorrow would have been without solace. But now, though I feel deeply for and with my dear Mrs. Bullen, there is a happy feeling of gratitude in my heart. Indeed my prayers were not ever omitted for the happy event with which the news of death is accompanied. Prayer works miracles; and if a cup of cold water brings a reward, we may well hope that the benevolence and many

¹ This was Mr. N. J. Crowley.

real Christian virtues of the dear departed pleaded powerfully. The Divine grace—the effectual grace—has been granted, and in the midst of sorrow my heart rejoices. Yet I know the loss which Mrs. Bullen must feel. . . . I feel delighted in this dear friend finding comfort in your visits, which I know you will continue. Say all you know I really feel, and assure her that at the greater number of our holy altars, the most Holy Sacrifice shall be offered to-morrow for the dear friend of my youth—almost the kind and affectionate son of my dear parents. I have sent your note to St. Mary's Priory, Kilcornan, and begged to have a Mass on Wednesday for the same intention. A Mass shall be offered at one or other holy altar under my power, for the remaining days of the nine; and the prayers of all Sisters and poor in our houses. . . . Now, with true love to each dear Sister, I must only add, that I remain,

“Ever affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,”
“M. A.”

Soon afterwards, Mrs. Aikenhead had to lament the loss of one of the members of the Congregation, a Sister much valued and beloved, who, while still a young novice, had exerted herself with great zeal in the cholera hospital during the Dublin visitation. For some time before her death, she had belonged to Mother Catherine's community in Gardiner Street, where she died of

brain fever, in 1845. Referring to this death Mrs. Aikenhead writes :

"About the time your welcome lines reached me, you will have had my serious packet of the 7th instant, and I trust in the Divine mercy your charity has ere now been effectual on behalf of our dear departed Sister Mary Vincent. Good and very amiable she was ; but oh ! her dear soul is safe, and if yet she requires our aid of prayers, still we are well secured (as far as mortals can) that she will enjoy the blessed union with our Lord and loving Spouse, whose own she was and is. . . . To be out of the power of any temptation is bliss. But, my dear mother, you and I, and all our dear Sisters around you, ought to *love* what our Heavenly Father ordains for us, and to bear ever in mind that *it is a glorious lot to live and be allowed to labour for God*. This I learned from the dying lips of a young and saintly nun, when near her last struggle, and I have often thought that if any one ever died in the enjoyment of a certain conviction of the Divine Presence, that holy soul was the one. So, my dear, let us ever glory in our exercises of mind and of body in this life, trying to live by faith. Oh, may we truly love our God, and ever accept the crosses He appoints ! Amen."

The Reverend Mother had a great objection to any of the Sisters wishing or praying for death, and always earnestly strove to imbue them with her own thought, that it was a glorious lot

to live and labour for God. She strongly disapproved of little compacts between friends, that whoever died and went first to Heaven, should intercede that the other should speedily follow; and when on one occasion she discovered that such an understanding had existed between two Sisters, who died within a short time of each other, she decidedly forbade that any compacts of this kind should be made. It would be a bad way, she considered, to forward the cause of righteousness in the world, if the Congregation were to be thus thinned of some, perhaps, of its most spiritual members.

“You must be generous,” she once wrote, “in the full spirit of our 19th Rule, and not allow the faint-hearted idea of wishing to be relieved by death, to have one instant’s place even in your passing thoughts. Only saints like St. Paul can wish for death purely and perfectly. In you or in myself it would be cowardice—*worse*, my dear child, it is tainted with unwillingness to suffer for Him who called us to labour in that most blessed vocation of ‘co-operating with Him in the salvation of souls.’ *Sursum Corda*. Try to bring home to your inmost heart, the maxim and constant aspiration of St. Teresa—‘To suffer and *not* to die.’ To us who are not saints, the uprising of nature will oppose that petition, but be assured that a very great illusion might arise and bring on temptation to non-conformity with the Divine will, were we to listen to any desire to

die, even if persuaded that our desire arose from the wish to avoid sin. Don't be lazy, my child, in the following of Jesus our King and Spouse to Calvary, carrying our cross even when our own imperfections and tendencies to sin are the most burdensome share of that cross. It ought with us to be a glorious thing to live and labour for God : and so—Amen."

CHAPTER XII.

MORE FOUNDATIONS. AN ORDEAL FOR THE CONGREGATION.

AN important and desirable change which took place during Mrs. Aikenhead's residence at St. Vincent's, was the removal to Donneybrook, in 1837, of St. Mary Magdalen's Asylum in Townsend Street. Mrs. Ryan, the lady who had superintended the asylum before the Sisters of Charity took charge of it, had funded a sum of £1,500, and Donneybrook Castle being about this time advertised for sale, the money was applied to the purchase of it, with the adjoining grounds; and a good laundry was fitted up. This place, in the middle of the last century, was the home of the Right Hon. Chief Justice Flood, and his eldest son, the great Henry Flood, spent his childhood there. At a later period it was occupied by other noteworthy persons, and several celebrities, it seems, lived in the neighbourhood of Donneybrook Green.

The grounds around Donneybrook Castle consisted of five statute acres, and as the Sisters of Charity, up to this time, had no burial ground of their own, it was resolved to lay out one of

the fields as a cemetery for the Congregation. On the first Sunday of October, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the removal was happily effected from the dilapidated tenement in Townsend Street to the commodious and healthful residence at Donneybrook.

In 1840, a branch of the Congregation was sent to Preston in Lancashire; but though the presence of the Sisters was greatly needed, and the work peculiarly arduous, sufficient funds were not forthcoming for the support of the community, and after struggling on amid great difficulties for about eight years, it became clear to Mrs. Aikenhead that she would have to resign Preston. In October, 1848, the Sisters were recalled to Dublin, but not without having achieved some good results, and improved the religious aspect of the town. They were succeeded after a few years by the Faithful Companions, whose schools for the education of the better classes, which is the object of their Institute, place them above the difficulties which had surrounded the Sisters of Charity, engaged as they were altogether in the service of the poor.

The Waterford foundation in 1841, was a very successful one; although at first the prospects did not seem very encouraging, as the Bishop, Dr. Foran, could only promise a house rent free, and a charity sermon. But good friends helped to make the way easier. Foremost among those most anxious to see a community of the Sisters

established in Waterford, was a dear friend of the Reverend Mother, Miss Christian Juan, whose name is closely associated with the Waterford foundation from its beginning, till her death in 1845. This lady received the Sisters at her own house, while waiting for the convent to be in readiness, and wrote an interesting account of the first days of their residence. The little history, which is written in a quaint, pleasing style, was sent to the Reverend Mother, and afterwards embodied in the annals of the Congregation.¹ Once started, the work was carried on with unflagging zeal. Schools were soon opened, and in the course of a few years, the Waterford convent, with its various branches of usefulness, became one of the most interesting and important houses of the Congregation; a house about which Mrs. Aikenhead's mind was always at rest, for the Rectress, Mrs. Gallwey, was one after her own heart, a true disciple and dear friend.

The ninth foundation of the Congregation was at Clarinbridge in the west of Ireland, and was made under very favourable circumstances. The convent was founded by Mrs. Redington of Kilcornan, with an endowment for five Sisters,

¹ It is given in Mrs. S. Atkinson's long and valuable work, where the fullest details will be found of the various foundations of Mary Aikenhead, and interesting personal notices of her friends, with much important historical matter, that makes the book, as has truly been said, much more than a mere biography.

and twelve acres of land, the gift of her son, Sir Thomas Redington, attached to the house. No expense was spared in providing all that was necessary for the work. The convent chapel was finished in a manner worthy of its purpose. The altar and tabernacle are of the most costly marble, and an exquisitely carved group in white marble, by the sculptor Hogan, representing the Ascension, surmounts the tabernacle. Over the altar hangs a fine copy of Raphael's Transfiguration. Besides undertaking the entire building and fitting up of the church, of which the altar and tabernacle alone cost £700, Mrs. Redington presented the convent with some extremely valuable gifts; a chalice of great beauty, consecrated by Pope Gregory XVI., with a golden cup, said to be worth £105; also a beautiful monstrance of emblematic design, and some very precious reliquaries.

On the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 16th, 1844, the nuns took possession of their new dwelling, the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy. Two schools were shortly afterwards opened, but did not provide sufficient accommodation for the number of applicants. Nothing could exceed the delight of the people at having the nuns among them, and their anxiety that their children should be brought under the influence of the Sisters. A Sunday school was also opened, in which both adults and children received instruction. The visitation of the sick poor was a laborious work,

involving a circuit of several miles, but as the needs of the people were so great, and there was no other convent nearer than Galway, the Sisters willingly undertook the extra toil. A sewing school was in course of time established at the convent, by the founder's daughter-in-law, Lady Redington; and the children were also taught lace-work, the sale of which, at a *depôt* for Irish work in London, provided a great help to many poor families in time of sickness and other troubles. The Rectress appointed to the convent at Clarinbridge, was Sister Mary Baptist Griffin, whose qualities, and especially the sweetness and humility of her disposition, made her a much beloved member of the Congregation, and gave her a remarkable power over all who came within her influence.

These successful foundations were very consoling to Mrs. Aikenhead. She had, however, many severe troubles and trials to bear. It was, of course, inevitable she should meet with difficulties and crosses, and for these her unconquerable spirit was always prepared. But there were two ordeals she had to pass through which pained her more than all the rest, because in these two instances the trouble came through friends whom she had trusted.

Allusion has been made in a former chapter to an attempt to change the constitutions of the Order, which took place shortly before their confirmation by the Holy See. But Mrs. Aikenhead

held firm to the Rule and her own principles, and the hour of peril passed, though not without the loss of some dear friends. The second instance occurred some time after the establishment of St. Vincent's. The aim was to alter the object of the Institute as regards the poor, and withdraw the Sisters to duties that seemed more intellectual, but were inconsistent with the ministrations of a Sister of Charity. The work of a public hospital was, in the estimation of some, out of the sphere of a nun; and the minute personal attendance on the sick poor, and lowly services rendered to them, were, in the eyes of these persons, unfitting labours for refined and educated women. Not many, indeed, among the Congregation shared in these sentiments; but what grieved Mrs. Aikenhead most deeply, was the attempt that was made to infect the younger Sisters and novices with the spirit of disloyalty and resistance.

Mrs. Aikenhead was the last woman to disregard intellectual culture, but that the service of the sick and suffering, for whose relief the Order had been established and specially existed, should be put into the background for any other pursuits, she would not for a moment contemplate. Archbishop Murray and others stood by her firmly in this as in the first instance. The subject need not be dwelt upon. The season of bitterness and trial had the effect, when it passed, of leaving the Institute more firmly rooted than ever on its

true foundation, and of drawing the Congregation more closely and lovingly round the great mother who had borne it through the crisis.

From this time, Mrs. Aikenhead's natural acuteness in the discernment of character became deepened to almost preternatural insight. She seemed able, with one of the "long glances" described by her children, to read the minds of others, and it became known that there was no use in trying to deceive the Reverend Mother, for she could "rip up the truth with a look."

This discernment of character appears constantly in her correspondence, especially when giving directions to a Superior regarding a young Sister or novice placed under her jurisdiction. "One word for all," she writes on one occasion, "beware of over-smooth, quiet folk. Those who fall into many faults either from ardent temperament, or even a certain degree of levity and vanity, have a good experience of humiliation, and with openness of heart will improve and be useful." The following analysis of character is worthy of quotation. Writing of a young member of the Congregation, Mrs. Aikenhead says:

"Talent of a useful kind she has, but we must try to plough up the ground somehow. True humility she has never evinced, and she is quite deficient in self-knowledge. Pray; and teach her as much as you can. I fear there is a want in her brain, and unless our Lord is pleased to grant abundant grace, I should fear our ever being

able to make use of the talent. Do, my dear child, teach her to take her heart asunder, and to look into the folds of it. She certainly thinks herself of more importance than any one without solid virtue can ever be in a community. That confidence which utter ignorance gives to certain characters is really astonishing. We often observe that she is one never apt to ask a question, and never to see her own defects; but she has one blessing, *good temper*. However, this is often an accompaniment of bold, undaunted characters. Don't be disedified. I only speak as I would of the maladies of her body to the physician. She is one who would really be the better of a real humiliation caused by her own actual fault."

Of another Sister the Reverend Mother says: "M—— has not much quickness, but if she turn her mind to zeal, and does not allow her own body and its ailments to occupy the powers of her soul—I mean the memory and the will—she has a vivacity of intellect which will help her. Indeed, the less we indulge our poor imaginations on points entirely selfish either relating to soul or body, the holier and happier we shall be. And I do believe the arch-enemy is ever trying to keep us occupied with self in some shape or other, well knowing, the cunning wretch, that whilst he can keep us in such occupation of mind, he succeeds in forming an obstacle to all sanctity."

Mrs. Aikenhead always met blame and misrepresentation of any kind by silence, and advised the

Superiors of the various convents to do likewise. An Order of this nature being still a novelty, she was sometimes asked to do things contrary to the spirit and letter of the rules, and was severely censured for refusal. Nothing would induce her to admit as a member any one who made stipulations as to being sent to a particular locality, or engaged in a special work. "I *never* will admit any person to profession," she wrote, "for a particular place. If ever that be done (no Superior could do it with a safe conscience), we may date the upset of the Congregation. If £3,000 a year or £10,000 were the fortune, a point of this kind, which includes the destruction of *obedience* and *dependence*, must never be conceded."

She was also sometimes blamed by outsiders for not admitting as members those who, after the trial of the noviceship, had been proved unsuitable subjects. But firm in the path of duty, and upheld by the loftiest standards, she bore all unflinchingly. "I have experienced enough," she wrote on one occasion, "to expect schemes and twists. . . . But, my dear Mother, let us remember the thorny crown worn by our Lord Jesus, and the accumulated load of the Cross, as well as of sins (our own adding to the burden) with which the Eternal Lover of souls ascended to Calvary, to secure our right to follow after, even to the Heaven of His glory; and let us try to return love for love by willingly suffering for the salvation of His creatures. Poor — will yet be a bright

gem in the crown which we Sisters of Charity will present to our Immaculate Mother."

In another letter she thus alludes to the difficulties that frequently beset her: "Dearest, I said it was literally 'live horse and you shall have oats.' . . . Only that we must confide in the miraculous Providence of the Almighty Father, I own to you I should 'faint in the way,' from the difficulties that surround us; but we must try our best to stand steadily under the heat and burden of the day, and with perseverance labour in our special engagements in the service of the poor. . . . A Sister of Charity would be very faulty who should refuse to cast all her solicitude upon that Almighty Providence of whose miraculous power we have had during the last thirty years such constant and wonderful proofs."

The Reverend Mother was very careful to warn her children against false zeal, and the slightest indication of jealousy of other Institutes. The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy was formed into a Religious Congregation about fifteen years after Mrs. Aikenhead had commenced her work, and gave rise, among injudicious friends, to comparisons, and a kind of rivalry, very contrary to the desire of the head of either Congregation. Mrs. Aikenhead thus refers to the subject:

"Let us take care of every illusion of false zeal, or false love of our own Institute. Both are intended for the same great end, of promoting the glory of our Heavenly Father, and the good

of the poor. We cannot promote either if charity does not reign in our hearts. All other feelings merge in self, and miserable earthly preference for self will banish the Divine Spirit from us. Let us remember that no effort of human exertion could succeed in forming their Institute if God had not assisted; and should we presume to wish His favours to be confined only to ourselves? Our efforts must be to deserve the fullest measure of the Divine blessing on our Congregation and the good works entrusted to our care; but would it be like the children of the God of *infinite love* to allow corrupt nature to grow rebellious in our hearts, so as to repine that others equally His children, and redeemed by His precious Blood, should be made the chosen instruments of His mercy to the poor and afflicted? Look into the sentiment, and see how unworthy it is of our high vocation."

Elsewhere she writes: "In the Holy Church there is room for all. We shall please God only by disinterested zeal for His greater glory." And again, speaking of some new Orders about to be introduced into the country, she says: "There will be all the beauty and ornament of variety; and may we emulate the glorious privilege of being interwoven as worthy branches, or even sweet flowers, of the holy garland, which is to decorate the dear Island of Saints!"

Among the band of earnest devoted friends and true disciples who stood firm to Mary Aikenhead

through all struggles, vicissitudes, and labours, and were with her to the last, may be specially mentioned Mother Frances Magdalen MacCarthy, Rectress of St. Vincent's, who was now also Mother Assistant in the Congregation, and as Mrs. Aikenhead grew year after year more disabled, was often called on to make the new foundations, and to represent the head Superior on various occasions. Though not possessed of such striking and diverse qualities as the Reverend Mother, Mrs. MacCarthy was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Institute, and well fitted by her talents for the important position she was afterwards to fill as the second Mother General of the Irish Sisters of Charity.

Another devoted friend and disciple, who is described as being "hands, feet, and eyes" to the Reverend Mother during her latter years, and who, we are told, as she flitted from convent to convent on various confidential embassies, "looked like the Mother's spirit on the wing," was a Sister whose acquaintance with Mrs. Aikenhead began at York, where she was a pupil when Mary Aikenhead and her companion were preparing for their mission. The little girl had been greatly attracted by the noble presence and gracious manner of Sister Augustine, and she never forgot her. In the course of time circumstances led to her visiting the Mother General of the Sisters of Charity, and finally to her joining the Congregation, of which, despite the elegancies and joys

of life she had forsaken, she made a steady, hard-working member. Many others there were also, whose attachment to herself, and zeal for the welfare of the Order, were a source of great consolation to Mrs. Aikenhead in her declining years. Their names are remembered and beloved in their communities, and are preserved, with their deeds and holy deaths, in the annals of the Congregation.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUR LADY'S MOUNT. FOUNDATION AT CLONMEL.

DURING the winter of 1844, Mrs. Aikenhead suffered greatly from attacks of bronchitis. Change of air was absolutely necessary. Mere driving out, when the spring came, did not answer the purpose, and the long ascent to her own apartments on her return was too fatiguing. She was reluctant for some time to leave St. Vincent's, where she had resided for eleven years. But there was no help for it. A house in the suburbs was anxiously sought for, and at last a place was selected at Harold's Cross, belonging to members of the Society of Friends, who, in the transaction, behaved very honourably towards Mrs. Aikenhead, refusing a higher offer they had received, because they had already given their promise to the Sisters of Charity.

Though the house was small for the purpose, there was space for building on; and there were fields and a large garden round the mansion. Possession was taken in September, 1845, and Mrs. Aikenhead removed at once to her new abode. The large parlour was arranged as a

temporary chapel, and the Blessed Sacrament was deposited in the tabernacle on the 14th of September, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. From that day is dated the foundation of the Convent of Our Lady's Mount. The privilege of being the mother-house, till then enjoyed by Stanhope Street, was by order of the ecclesiastical Superior, transferred to Harold's Cross, and the novices were removed thither from St. Vincent's, where they had been lodged for some time.

The Reverend Mother soon found herself refreshed by the change to the healthy suburb, and enjoyed being drawn round the grounds in her bath-chair by some of the novices, whom she encouraged to laugh and talk freely with her, and if anything amusing arose, she seemed to enter into it as heartily as the youngest of the party. Or she would sit for hours in the shade of one of the fine old trees, while she busied herself with her voluminous correspondence, or sometimes received a visitor.

The following spring a fine building was erected, which provided a good refectory, a chapel, and twelve cells. The large parlour was then used as a school-room for the young women employed in the neighbouring factory, who attended at the convent after work hours to receive religious and secular instruction. After a few years, however, Mrs. Aikenhead was able to build the present large school-house within the

grounds, which contains besides, the class-rooms, a large refectory, where the poorer children receive a daily meal, two good play-rooms for use in wet weather, and a room devoted to the erection of a crib at Christmas.

The same year that Mrs. Aikenhead moved to Harold's Cross, the Congregation made its tenth foundation, and on the feast of the Guardian Angels took possession of the Convent of Our Lady of Angels, Clonmel. The funds for this foundation were supplied by Sister M. Emilian Bradshaw, whose ample fortune helped to support other houses besides. A convert in early years to the Catholic faith, her story is so touching that it may be alluded to. Her mother, a very bigoted Protestant, brought up the little girl and her younger brother with the greatest strictness. The two children were devotedly attached to each other, and used to read the Bible together, and talk over its wonderful, beautiful stories. They learned to say the Hail Mary, and one of the first things that raised suspicion in their minds about the truth of the Protestant religion, was the horror their mother evinced on discovering this; for it seemed to them a very strange thing that every honour should not be paid to one on whom Heaven had bestowed such extraordinary marks of favour and who had been declared Blessed by the lips of an Angel. They kept pondering on the subject till it took complete possession of their minds. When at length their

mother died, the two children, whose other relations or guardians do not seem to have interfered with them, set about being Catholics, and went together to inform the parish priest of their intention. The elder was then not more than twelve years of age, so it is not surprising that he at first put them off. After a time, however, finding that their fervour was not to be cooled, he prepared them for the sacraments and received them into the Church. The two children soon afterwards were parted and sent to school. The boy died of consumption at seventeen years of age, firm in the faith. The girl, in the course of time, chose the religious life, and brought the bulk of her large property to the Sisters of Charity.

Her humility and sweetness of disposition, combined with much energy of character and good abilities, endeared her greatly to Mrs. Aikenhead; but her religious ardour, which never abated, was the distinguishing feature of her character and the mainspring of all her actions. Her great desire was to see a convent of the Sisters of Charity founded in Tipperary, where her property was situated, and she had set apart a fund for this purpose; but difficulties opposed her wishes for some time. In the end the fund intended for the town of Tipperary had to be transferred to Clonmel, where, in 1845, the foundation was made, and the Sisters of Charity began their mission, with a wide field for labour before them.

The most that Mrs. Aikenhead could now accomplish in the way of activity, was an occasional drive to the convents in or near Dublin. Her convents in Waterford, Clarinbridge, and Clonmel, she never saw; but so remarkable was her memory, and so well developed her organ of locality, that the interior arrangements and outward surroundings of these houses were as clearly mapped out before her mind's eye as if she had visited them many times; and she often astonished people by her reference to sites and objects which had merely been described to her, perhaps several years before.

In consequence of being unable in so many cases, to personally superintend matters, her correspondence was a most laborious work, and we read that, like St. Teresa, she was nearly "ground to powder," with writing letters. Nor had she, even at Our Lady's Mount, uninterrupted time for them. The nuns were constantly coming to her about various important matters, for, however occupied, she was always helpful, and prompt in devising effective remedies in any difficulty. The novices were flitting in and out, for she liked to have them about her; and though the callers were fewer than at St. Vincent's, several visitors did make their way to Harold's Cross, to see and consult the Reverend Mother on affairs of business. As the Superiors of many of the convents were young and inexperienced,

she had, in fact, the work of training them ; and this had to be done by correspondence in the case of those at too great a distance for personal intercourse. She threw herself heart and soul into the task, for she was most anxious, as old age approached, that the spirit of the first band of Sisters of Charity should be transmitted to future generations. She took care, however, in her letters of instructions, not to hamper a Superior with minute directions, or to interfere unnecessarily, but was always ready with wise and kind advice and guidance when it was needed. Thus tenderly and encouragingly she writes to a new Superior who was nervous at the responsibility of her position and her own unfitness :

“With all the anxiety you express, and I know feel weightily, yet I am quite satisfied (and hope not to be disappointed in my expectations), that by your humbly praying and exercising yourself in humble dependence on our Heavenly Father, you will be enabled to fulfil your arduous duties in training the little community to exact observance and fidelity in fulfilling their engagements. Do all on your part steadily, and as fervently as you can urge your poor nature to creep on ; if you cannot walk as a stout soldier, even take St. Teresa's advice, and *trail* yourself onwards in the disposition to be holding the station of a poor worm before the Divine Majesty, who has Himself placed you within the inner court of His earthly habitation. Beware of despondency. If

we be truly humble we shall *never* despond. Fear not to rely on the intellect which God has given you, even if you dread being inclined to see faults in others too clearly. You are not to close your eyes, but to raise your heart to God, and undertake simply and charitably to do your part in trying to improve, to admonish, and to correct those dear spouses of His, in order to render them more perfect observers of the holy Rule He has ordained for our perfection."

To another who was trembling at her responsibilities, she writes :

"Do, my dear —, exert the good sense with which God has blessed you, but, above all, exercise unlimited confidence in Him who will never allow you to be tried beyond your strength. Be assured of it, the alarm we sometimes feel at undertaking offices of importance, arises not unfrequently from self-love and pusillanimity. . . . The arch-enemy knows your weak point and assails it. In the Holy Name, then, tell him to begone. Believe me, by trying to combat this point of self-love, you will please the Divine Majesty more than by fasts and austerities. Some penance we must all do. In the Name of Him who has called us to honour Him, take up the spiritual armour spoken of by St. Paul, and proclaim against the enemies you have renounced in Baptism—the devil, the world, and the flesh—that you will fight the battle stoutly. The flesh is our own *self-love*; the world, in our regard

as Religious, is, for the most part, *human respect*; and the hoof of the wicked one, the tail of the serpent, will ever be discovered by the lowly-minded who petition with the Church for a *right understanding*."

This prayer for a "right understanding," was a favourite one with the Reverend Mother, and she constantly urged upon her children the importance of it on all occasions.

In another letter containing hints how to deal with a young Sister of somewhat peculiar disposition, she says:

"Treat her with patient forbearance. . . . Take care of the illusions of zeal, and do not condemn quickly. Even when you are certain, exercise charity and patience, remembering that each is as yourself a chosen spouse of Christ, each most dear to His Sacred Heart who gave not way to indignation at the perfidy of Judas, neither did He rebuke St. Peter when he denied Him, with any word or tone of anger—nor did the Saint lose his place in that loving Heart. Our duty is to be like the Good Shepherd in the very parable taught us by His own sacred words. We must support those who are weak, bind up the wounds and fractures of our flock, even before they complain of the pain brought on by their own folly. . . . Pray, and encourage all to pray, with St. Augustine for self-knowledge.

In Mrs. Aikenhead's correspondence, from first to last, we observe how lovingly she notes anni-

versaries, and alludes to saints' days. She would often write her letters on the festival of one of her friends among the saints, or would post them so as to be received on the feast. When St. Augustine's feast came, she would always beg for prayers. To one of her correspondents she writes: "Oh, that I had one spark of my dear patron's holy penitential love of God! Do, dear child, try to love your Heavenly Spouse whilst you are young. The heart grows hard and chilly with old folk, unless like this glorious penitent they set the fire strong and lasting whilst youth is in its freshness—then years will not diminish the steady flame. Alas! alas! I thought I should have effected this in my youthful days, and truly, my dear child, I feel that I have failed. So take warning, and pray for yours affectionately in Christ. M. A."

Another saint to whom she had a special devotion was Mary Magdalen, whom she invoked for the grace of perfect contrition and love, and the memory of St. Teresa was always warmly cherished by her. She was also very anxious that the patron saint of each Sister should be honoured by all, as she considered that this encouraged a spirit of universality and of true charity. With the same idea she was always very careful to interest the Sisters in the work of other houses besides their own, and not to regard the employments they themselves were engaged in as of pre-eminent importance, that so the whole

Congregation should be united in the one truly fraternal spirit :

“Each and all of our foundations,” she says, “are of importance even greater than we are aware of according to poor limited human calculations; but let us hope and mutually pray that each and all of us may deserve to be supernaturally enlightened to see and understand the full value of our holy vocation, as also to understand clearly the dependence of each branch of our Congregation on the others, so as that prayer may be zealous for all. This *Catholic* spirit should be cultivated, and let no Sister ever suppose her own employ either to be less important or less holy than that of her Sisters of the Congregation; and on the other hand, let none of us reckon on being more elevated by our more apparently useful or even spiritual employs.”

Her wonderful faith in prayer appears very strikingly all throughout her correspondence. We find her continually requesting the prayers of others for things great and small. She herself said that her letters were like litanies, for *pray*, *pray*, is the constant refrain. Valuing prayer as she did, it was a great comfort to her to know that the Sisters of Charity had a share in the prayers of other religious communities.

“I must tell you,” she writes, “that quite spontaneously we have had assurance of holy aid from two very edifying communities early this

year. In one, the Superioress had assigned for the Sisters of Charity all the prayers and good works of an entire fortnight. In that very fervent community are upwards of fifty good Religious. . . . We have established unions of prayer and good works with dear old York, now in all its renewed increase of numbers and holiness; with the Congregation of Hospitaliers of St. Thomas; and with that of the real Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent. . . . One word: Let *all* your intentions include 'those who are thus united to us.' I think you know we are in union with the Dominican Order, and also formally with the Society of Jesus. This last obtained for us by the present Father Provincial of the English Province, Father Lythgoe. And it is because I feel deeply the urgent necessity of the aid of prayer that I am comforted by it."

She was most particular that the friends, benefactors, and founders of her institutions should share in the suffrages of the Congregation. "Let us all bear in mind," she says, "that the more constant and fervent our prayers for benefactors, both living and dead, shall be, the more firm may be our dependence on an increase of benefactors. We are bound to be faithful in this exercise of grateful charity towards every benefactor of every house and mission of the Congregation; also towards every individual who contributes to support the charitable institutions of every sort under the care of our Sisters in various

places." But all God's creatures were to be remembered, in accordance with the duty of charity. "By this constant exercise," she says elsewhere, "we shall obtain all the graces promised to the charitable and the merciful."

But in spite of spiritual cares, and the most weighty matters to claim her attention, Mrs. Aikenhead's letters of this time, like those of an earlier date, were full of variety, and many of them contain allusions to domestic and other concerns. In one letter we find her alluding with much interest to some turkeys which a Rectress was anxious to have for her poultry-yard, and the Reverend Mother sends her £2 for the purchase. In another very characteristic letter she expresses great pleasure at being able to send, owing to the receipt of an unexpected sum of money, the needful cash to buy a cow that was badly wanted by a rural community. "Now *Deo gratias*, and 100 Amens," she concludes; "don't make a bad use of my secret miracles by expecting them too often, but be very good, and pray a great deal. I hope to hear of a Mistress Blackberry or a Mistress Daisy being added to your dairy soon. I hope it may be the latter, as I have always understood the red cows to be the best milkers."

Her anxiety that everything should be done in the best way, often led her to take trouble on herself which she might have deputed to others, and she frequently supervised the housekeeping

department herself, so as to be sure—not that things were provided at the lowest cost, for this she considered mistaken economy—but that they were good and suitable of their kind.

Nor were natural ties, so far as they could be regarded, ever forgotten by her. She always continued to take a deep interest in her married sister and her children; and during the absence at one time of Mrs. Hinkson on the Continent, she took charge of her youngest daughter, Ellie, and had her at St. Vincent's, in the convent part of the institution, to be treated by Dr. O'Ferrall for hip disease. Afterwards the child was brought to Harold's Cross, and was much with the Reverend Mother, and greatly loved by the nuns, on account of her sweet disposition, talent, and early piety. It was hoped she might live to become a Sister of Charity, but this hope was not to be realized, for she died at about fourteen years of age.

CHAPTER XIV.

PROGRESS IN CORK. BEREAVEMENTS.

THE year 1848 now dawned, with its revolutions abroad, and insurrection and famine at home, which brought trouble and trial into many of Mrs. Aikenhead's communities. She thus alludes to the position of things :

“As to the state of public excitement in Dublin, no one not on the spot can easily imagine it. Nor do we hear much ; but truly enough to alarm any one who can remember '98 and 1803. But all we have to do is to pray that peace may be preserved, otherwise property will be destroyed, and, what is worse, the lives of thousands will be lost. We hear of many apprehensions, but our part is to pray and be as silent as we can.”

In another letter, with regard to affairs abroad, she writes :

“We know very little of public news, but enough to assure us of very bad goings on in Italy, especially in Rome, whence it is reported that the Holy Father has been obliged to abscond. I hope all with you continue faithful and fervent in prayer, as in duty bound ; for His Holiness in the first instance, he being now in a state of

danger and of great affliction ; for the Holy Church, which must feel the present state of its Spiritual Head ; and for all the world, especially our own depressed dear Ireland. The prayer of the Bishop of Jerusalem, we ought to recite frequently for our own souls ; it is beautiful ; and for all the States of Christendom—for all who are in trial and turmoil. Charity demands our constant petitions, so pray, and do not faint.”

A great grief to her was the affliction of one of the kindest friends of the Sisters of Charity in Waterford, Mr. Meagher (the brother-in-law of Christian Juan) whose son was condemned to death—afterwards commuted to transportation for life—for implication in the insurrectionary movement of 1848. The times were full of discouragement, but to yield to despondency even for a moment, was always, in Mrs. Aikenhead’s opinion, an unworthy act.

The pressure of calamity was especially great on the Cork community, and Mrs. Aikenhead, who always regarded the Cork foundation with particular affection, shared in spirit all their trials. The energies of the Sisters were strained to the utmost. The poor people who were not struck down by fever were prostrated by famine ; and the scenes of misery are declared by those who witnessed them to baffle description. During the worst period the fever hospitals and work-houses were full, and numbers of people, wasted by famine and fever, might be seen daily lying on

the footpaths and roads, waiting for the chance of admittance. Thus, once more, the Sisters of Charity were called upon to help in a crisis yet more heart-rending than the cholera visitation of 1832. They not only laboured to help, but actually suffered with the poor ; for several caught the fever, although, happily, not with fatal results. But at length the famine year came to a close. Great efforts were made by the wealthier classes of Cork to save the starving people ; and from America and elsewhere came liberal supplies of food, of which the Sisters of Charity received a good share, to minister to the wants of the extern poor, and help to support the inmates of some of their asylums during the time of distress.

But if Mrs. Aikenhead had at this period much reason for anxiety regarding the Cork community, she had also great cause for joy and thanksgiving. Since its foundation, in 1826, the progress, in spite of difficulties, had been steady. Lately, the Asylum of St. Mary Magdalen, which had been founded in 1809 by Mr. Therry, of Cork, had been placed under the care of the Sisters, with the arrangement that a new convent, to replace "Cork Castle," should be erected on the property of the Asylum, and in intimate connection with it. The foundation-stone of the convent was laid by the Bishop, Dr. Murphy, in 1844, and fifteen months later, in November, 1845, the Sisters took possession of their new abode. Shortly afterwards, the community—having been increased

by the arrival of five Sisters from Dublin—entered on the charge of St. Mary Magdalen's Asylum. It was an occasion of sincere rejoicing to Mrs. Aikenhead, to see the Sisters released from a dwelling, the inconveniences of which, during nineteen years, had hampered them so much, and which was also so unhealthily situated.

The famine and fever visitation had so absorbed the attention of the community, that while it lasted they had not been able to do much for the improvement of the asylum, which needed a good deal of remodelling; but when the aspect of affairs brightened a little, they set seriously to work. "We have undertaken the care of the Penitents' Asylum," writes Mrs. Aikenhead at this time. "It is indeed arduous, and will, I expect, afford us many and not trifling opportunities to prove to our Heavenly Father that every part and portion of our willing labour in His own Divine service is gratefully undertaken."

Donations were needed, as a new laundry had to be built, and the house did not afford sufficient accommodation for the increasing number of inmates. Benefactors arose, however, some of whom continued during several years to send liberal remittances to the community. Among the friends who gave substantial aid should be mentioned Mr. John Troy, a nephew of Archbishop Troy, who took a deep interest in the community, and while the new convent was in course of erection, superintended the work him-

self, planted shrubs in the garden with his own hands, and presented the convent with many beautiful paintings, rare engravings, and other articles. Mrs. Aikenhead's letters to Cork at this time abound with expressions of gratitude to this kind and thoughtful friend. "I feel we shall not diminish what we owe to the Divine Majesty by our gratefulness to the friends He has raised up for us," she says. And in another place: "May our Lord reward our respected friend—we may well say *patron*—Mr. Troy. His charity and zeal in our behalf have been a real treasure from that loving Providence who has so wonderfully preserved our little barque through so many and such storms."

In 1852, Mrs. Aikenhead sustained the greatest loss that she could have met with, in the death of him who had been to her both friend and father throughout the whole of her religious life—the founder of the Irish Sisters of Charity. The death of Dr. Murray came upon the Reverend Mother as a sudden blow. It is true he was eighty-four years of age, and the end was to be expected; but his form was still erect, and the quiet energy which had always distinguished him remained unimpaired, so that people found it hard to think of him as old. The stroke of paralysis which ended his life came upon him on the morning of Shrove Tuesday, just as he was about to enter his oratory to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. Mrs. O'Brien, who was in the

habit of coming to hear Mass in the oratory, happened to be with him at the moment of the attack. Dr. O'Ferrall, his Grace's physician, was instantly sent for; but little could be done, and two days later the Archbishop breathed his last.

The whole of Ireland mourned for him. Crowds came to his residence in Mountjoy Square, to look their last on their beloved Archbishop, as he lay, arrayed in full pontificals, on a high catafalque which was surrounded with candles. The jewelled mitre, the pectoral cross, and the crozier, were placed beside the body. The expression of the countenance was said to be heavenly in its majestic beauty. Temporary altars were erected in the room, and Masses offered up each morning till the following Sunday afternoon, when the remains were borne to the Pro-Cathedral, and laid before the high altar. Two days later the funeral rites were celebrated with all fitting solemnity, and the earthly relics of the saintly Archbishop were laid to rest in the vaults of the Cathedral, beside the remains of his predecessor in the see of Dublin, Dr. Troy.

As years passed on, Mrs. Aikenhead found an opportunity of raising a lasting monument to the memory of the father and founder of her Congregation. It had long been the desire of the Reverend Mother to erect a little church which should be a fitting dwelling for the Most Holy Sacrament. It distressed her that there should be cells over the chapel at Our Lady's Mount;

and as the accommodation which the Novitiate-house afforded was now insufficient for the numbers seeking admission into the Congregation, the large room used as a chapel and the adjoining sacristy could be arranged to meet the requirements, if a church were built. There were no funds in hand for the work, but some money was expected to come in, which Mrs. Aikenhead resolved to devote to this purpose. With her characteristic energy and reliance on Divine Providence, she procured plans at once, and arranged for the commencement of the work. On the 18th of March, the feast of the Archangel Gabriel, 1857, the foundation-stone was laid by the new Archbishop, the Most Rev. Dr. Cullen; and as the building progressed, contributions came in from the friends and well-wishers of the Congregation.

The Reverend Mother was very desirous that the altar should be worthy of its purpose, and be of marble, which had always been her ideal of what was fitting in the house of God; and it occurred to her that this might be accomplished by devoting to its erection a sum of one hundred guineas, which Archbishop Murray had bequeathed to her as a little token of friendship. Thus the money would procure honour for the Most High, and perpetuate the memory of the founder of the Sisters of Charity. This work of love the Reverend Mother never saw completed, for before the church was ready for use she had passed to the

Communion of Saints, beyond this world. But the altar remains, a beautiful memorial not only of Dr. Murray, but of Mrs. Aikenhead herself; for in the inscription on the back, the names of both the founders of the Order are associated; as it tells that the altar was erected by the Reverend Mother Mary Aikenhead to the memory of the Most Rev. Daniel Murray, with the one hundred guineas he bequeathed to her.

Two years after the death of Dr. Murray, the Congregation met with the loss of the devoted Sister who had been with Mrs. Aikenhead from the first start of the work—Mother Catherine Walsh. This greatly-beloved member of the Order passed away on Christmas Day, 1854, after a long-protracted and exceedingly trying illness. She is described by those who knew her as the *beau ideal* of a Sister of Charity, hard to herself, but kind to others. For many years she was the presiding genius of the Gardiner Street Convent, which, besides enjoying the distinction of having the best schools, was looked upon as the great mission-house of the Congregation. The visitation of the sick was carried on with untiring devotion by the community. The convent had become the centre of charitable work of all kinds. The poor resorted thither for assistance in their distress, and were helped in various ways. Mother Catherine was known as the especial friend of the afflicted, and both rich and poor carried their tales of sorrow to pour into her sympathizing

ears. It was remarked that no matter how sad and downcast they looked in coming, they always went away with brighter faces, frequently saying to the Sister who opened the door, "She is an angel!" She is described even in old age as having a beautiful and engaging countenance, which no painter could do justice to; and when she entered any of the school-rooms, the children would utter a cry of delight.

It may well be imagined that the illness and death of such a one was the cause of deep and wide-spread grief, and numerous were the prayers offered for her both before and after her decease. Mrs. Aikenhead thus alludes to the intensity and duration of her sufferings, in which she resembled her patron saint of Siena, whose name she bore, and who had always been her model:

"I think I before observed to you that we have an idea that in the mysterious appointments of our Almighty Father, this dear soul is left to endure her purgatory in this world, and, indeed, my child, a very severe purgatory it is. I cannot bring to my mind that I was ever aware of our dear Mother Catherine being devoted to pray that she may have her purgatory in this life, yet I know that many pious persons are accustomed to do so. I do not condemn any, yet I feel that our perfectly committing all to the holy appointment of that Divine Will, is perhaps the best for those who feel the weakness of poor nature, and will be equally pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

I have said enough to urge all your charity in addition to your duty. As soon as you can, ask for the Holy Sacrifice to be celebrated for dear Mother Catherine."

But the happy release came at last, and surrounded by her community, and with all the aids that the Church affords, she calmly breathed her last as the Mass-bells were ringing over the city, and crowds were hastening to the various churches to offer their homage to the Infant Redeemer and His Virgin Mother. She had often expressed a wish to die on Christmas Day, and it pleased God to grant the desire of His devoted servant.

CHAPTER XV.

BENADA ABBEY.

ALTHOUGH Mrs. Aikenhead had benefited greatly by the change to Harold's Cross, the old ailments still remained her constant companions, and attacks of bronchitis became very frequent and severe as she advanced in years. "As for myself," she says, "each attack leaves a new sting after it, and though looking, as folks say, quite well, my ailments are neither few nor light. Time with me is, in every sense of the word, very short; but the hours of a shortened day need to be the better spent, as years are not at all to be depended on, nor expected." In 1847, she had so severe an attack of bronchitis that her life was despaired of, and at the suggestion of Dr. O'Ferrall, the two greatest physicians of that day, Sir Philip Crampton and Sir Henry Marsh, were called in for consultation. But her fine constitution rallied, and to the surprise of all, she was soon to be seen sitting up, pen in hand, as of old.

But from that time her life was a struggle against an accumulation of infirmities, and she was held up only by her wonderful vitality. Full

of intellectual life and mental power, she retained her interest in passing events, though suffering great bodily pain. And this probably accounts for her lengthened life, in the midst of so many infirmities. She still had a wonderful attraction even for those who met her first at this time. One of her children whose acquaintance with the Reverend Mother began about this date, dwells on every reminiscence of her with tender affection and reverence, and in a graphic little narrative which she has penned, tells how pleasantly she was struck, when on coming to arrange about entering the Noviceship, the "great old Mother" came into the room, leaning on a stick, and attended by a black dog, which leaped up beside her when she sat down, and was introduced to the young lady as "Dandy," her "faithful dog." She continues: "There was a grandeur in the outline of the features and in their expression; and there were certain curves about the mouth and cheeks which I do not remember to have seen so marked in any other face. Her large, well-set eyes, which looked soft enough to melt when she was moved, and were so heavenly when a holy chord was touched, had also much humour in them at times, and could give full expression to a majestic severity when it was necessary to defend a just cause. Her soul shone through them. . . . She inspired both fear and love. But the fear was perhaps rather that diffidence which one feels in the presence of a powerful and

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strongly individualized character. And yet, I do not remember that I ever met any one to whom I approached with greater confidence and in whose presence I less felt my own weakness."

The Rev. Mother had an extraordinary power of subduing angry feelings in people, and commanding their instinctive respect. An instance is related of an old gentleman who came to the convent in a state of great irritation to speak to Mrs. Aikenhead, two of his daughters having set their hearts on entering her Congregation. But before he left he knelt down and asked the Reverend Mother's blessing. "Oh," she said, "to think of a patriarch asking my blessing!"

The following is so beautiful and touching that it must not be omitted. When the young novice was within a few months of the time for her profession, the Reverend Mother spoke of it on one occasion as a certain thing. "'Oh, Reverend Mother,' I said, 'it frightens me to think of it.' 'Why, my heart?' 'Oh, it is such an honour, such a great thing,' I answered, 'to be pledged to God in that way. I never could be worthy of it.' 'But it is *our own* God, you know,' she said, 'who comes to us in the Holy Communion. How could you be afraid of Him?' And she went on to speak of His goodness and His close union with us in the Blessed Sacrament. There was something so beautiful in the expression of her face, and her words conveyed such an idea of God's infinite condescension, that I felt my awe

change into hope and love, and went away with a new sense of His Almighty goodness."

An eminent ecclesiastic who knew Mrs. Aikenhead intimately, is said to have summed up his impression of her in the following words: "She reminded me of St. Teresa, or of St. Catherine of Siena, *with a dash of the Celtic nature.*"

Of all her foundations, St. Vincent's Hospital was undoubtedly the dearest to the heart of Mrs. Aikenhead, and the apple of her eye. When she was unable to visit it any longer, she kept herself well acquainted with all its affairs, and a day seldom passed without some communication between the mother-house and St. Vincent's. She took the greatest interest in hearing about the surgical operations; and on the days when critical operations were to be performed, she would request the lay-sister who was her constant attendant, to offer up prayers at the little altar in the room, for the poor patients and for the good doctors. All the friends and benefactors of the hospital, its former inmates, and its employés, were all regarded by the Reverend Mother with special kindness, and if any of them were in trouble, she did her very best to help them out of their difficulty.

In the summer of 1854, St. Vincent's Hospital had a narrow escape of destruction by fire. It was discovered in time, however, and the place saved, without having sustained any very heavy damage. But the danger was great, and but for

the presence of mind of the Sisters and servants of the institution, the flames would have reached the chapel, which was in the vicinity of the fire, and which, with all its oak furniture, would soon have been in a blaze. Mrs. Aikenhead, in a letter on the subject, speaks of the preservation of the hospital as a miracle of merciful protection, and special thanksgivings were made in all her houses.

As every calamity that afflicted her fellow-creatures concerned Mrs. Aikenhead, the Crimean War in 1854 greatly oppressed her. In her peaceful sanctuary, the rattle of musketry reached her ears, from the Phoenix Park, where the troops were at field exercise. She thus alludes to it in one of her letters of this date. After expressing her thankfulness for the wonderful protection of Providence experienced by the Congregation wherever it existed, she goes on :

“My dear Mother, let us *all* be fervent in mutual prayer and renewed efforts to prove our gratitude by deeds, according to St. Ignatius’ holy teaching. The best proof we can, any of us, give of this holy spirit of our 19th summary-rule will be in proportion as each of us tries effectually to give such repeated and sincere blows and wounds to self-love in its inmost recesses, as will weaken this our worst enemy so as to bring about its final destruction. . . . Let us practise well and steadily, for unless we do, how can we take the last aim right? I try to impress this idea

on my mind when I am, as it were, tortured by hearing the military practising their awful trade of fire-arms from the Park, whence their shots rebound, as it were, to the wall of this house; and they have been at it from the early hour of seven in the morning. During the year 1848, when Dublin was filled with the army, this sound of fire-arms constantly going on was to me as if we were in the seat of war. We must learn from every trade."

She sympathized deeply with those who were devoting all their energies to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded in the war, and alludes with full appreciation to the noble mission of the Sisters of Mercy who had just gone out to the East, requesting prayer to be offered up for them in all her convents, and Masses to be celebrated for the souls of those slain in the carnage: "You will be hearing," she writes to one of the Superiors, "of the heroic mission about to be undertaken by the Sisters of Mercy. . . . It is a point of duty in each of us to assist the good work by frequent prayer, and constant pure intention in those good works which our poor ability is able to compass. . . . Let us be specially fervent in doing all we can to aid the dear souls who are hourly departing from this life. My intention in causing the novena of Masses to be celebrated was for the relief of the precious souls of those who die in this sad carnage and have none to pray for them, that the act of holy charity may

bring a blessing on the charges we are engaged in.—A.M.D.G.”

During the next three years letter-writing even began to be difficult to the Reverend Mother, on account of a rheumatic affection in her fingers, and she speaks of “the poor lame pen.” She suffered too from an affection of the heart, and tendency to dropsy.

The last official act of the “great old Mother” was in connection with an event of peculiar and striking interest, and one which must indeed have rejoiced her heart. This was the restoration to religious uses of Benada Abbey, in the county Sligo; a property which in former days belonged to the Eremites of St. Augustine, who in the year 1423, founded a convent of their Order at a place called Benada, in the territory of Leyney. On this soil, and close to the venerable ruins of the Abbey, a foundation of Sisters of Charity was soon to be made. How this came about furnishes an interesting narrative, which may be just briefly related.

When the Elizabethan war broke out, and laid the island waste, the troops of Sir Richard Bingham invaded the Abbey, which by that time had become a great and flourishing establishment, and was a most majestic pile, constructed of hewn stone quarried in the neighbouring mountains. It was beautifully situated on the banks of the Moy, which fertilized the Eremites' fields and turned their mill, besides supplying an abundance

of fish; and was sheltered by a long stretch of the Ox Mountains; while around were forests in which the red deer roamed, and game abounded on the healthy acclivities and in the woodland brakes. This desirable property, with its dependencies, was given into the possession of a Welsh gentleman, Roger Jones, who was known to be a zealous propagator of the Protestant religion, and there is still in existence a warrant signed by him ordering the expulsion of the Jesuits from the kingdom.

Somehow, the Jones family managed to preserve the estate through all the wars and revolutions that followed, but its glory was gone, the sheltering woods were destroyed, and only wild moors and vast bogs met the eye. But though preserving their place in the country, the Joneses had little sympathy with the native population; and the close of the eighteenth century, which brought relief to the persecuted Catholics, found them as bitter as ever in their hatred.

The Roger Jones of that day seems to have been a man of violent temper; and hearing on one occasion that the parish priest was about to denounce from the altar a member of his flock, who lived on the lands of Benada, Mr. Jones threatened that if the priest dared to carry out his intention, he would assault him at the altar. The priest, however, took no notice, and on the following Sunday proceeded to perform what he

considered his duty, and mentioned the name of the man whose conduct deserved this public censure. Mr. Jones was in the church, among the Catholic congregation; and no sooner was the word spoken than he sprang over the altar-rails, and lifted his hand to commit the outrage. The people rose, and with one voice cried out: *The curse of St. Attracta be upon you!*¹ Immediately the uplifted arm dropped powerless, struck by a fatal paralysis.

The visitation produced a salutary effect upon him. He recognized a supernatural power in it. He sent for the priest and asked his forgiveness. After a time he requested to be received into the Catholic Church; and a warm friendship resulted; between the undaunted pastor and the lord of Benada. Mr. Jones' children were at this time old enough to choose their religion for themselves, and none of them became Catholics except the eldest son, who afterwards entered the priesthood. When dying, he left his possessions to his nephew Daniel, who did much to improve the family residence; and from him sprang the first generation of Catholic Joneses. The eldest son was educated in England. He early displayed a vocation for the priesthood, and at length decided to join the Society of Jesus; to the disappointment at first of his family, who had wished him

¹ St. Attracta has always been a very popular saint in that part of the country. She was noted for her great charity. There is a well in the neighbourhood sacred to her.

to enter political life. About the same time that he joined the Society, his sister offered herself as a candidate to Mrs. Aikenhead, and entered the Noviceship of the Sisters of Charity. In the course of time a second sister joined also, while a third became a Sister of Mercy.

Father Jones had resolved that the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity should become the owners of the ancestral seat of Benada Abbey. Old Mr. Jones, towards the close of his life, had also frequently expressed a wish that the property which had once been dedicated to religious uses might again be appropriated to the same service. A considerable time, however, had to elapse before matters could be so arranged as to permit of the legal conveyance of the property to Mrs. Aikenhead. But at length things were in a fair way; and Father Jones was anxious that she should at once append her name to the "vow" which was to form the act of acceptance on the part of the Congregation, and to the documents in which the conditions were specified and agreed to. It was with much joy that the Reverend Mother gratified the desire of the founder of the house of Our Lady of Benada, and a deep sense of thankfulness for the wonderful chain of events by which her Order was now about to become the owner of an estate that had once belonged to the sons of her own dear patron, St. Augustine. The vow is as follows :

“A.M.D.G.

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“Almighty and everlasting God, I, Mary Aikenhead, the unworthy instrument of the Divine Majesty in the Foundation of the Irish Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity, being moved by the desire of still further extending it to Thy greater glory by the establishment of a new convent at Benada, do beseech of Thee by the Precious Blood and Passion of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, to place the projected foundation under the special protection and patronage of His Blessed Mother, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. And I, as Superior of the Congregation, do promise, in presence of the most sacred Virgin Mary, and of Thy whole heavenly court, that, as far as in me lies, each Sister of Charity residing in that convent shall offer daily the prayer *Memorare* before the statue of the Immaculate Conception, honoured there at present under the title of “Our Lady of Benada,” in thanksgiving for our Lady’s protection. From Thine immense goodness and clemency, therefore, and by the Precious Blood and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, I suppliantly beseech Thee to accept this offering in the odour of sweetness, and to grant the requested favour to the honour of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and to the greater glory of Thy Holy Name.

“Done at Our Lady’s Mount, this fourth day of April, being the feast of Easter, in the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and fifty-eight.

“MARY AIKENHEAD.”

CHAPTER XVI.

DEATH OF MRS. AIKENHEAD.

FOR a long time before the date affixed to the vow, Mrs. Aikenhead had been entirely confined to her room. Her health was now failing very fast, and it was plain that her life was approaching its end.

The apartment at Our Lady's Mount, Harold's Cross, where the Mother General of the Congregation spent her latter years, is peculiarly interesting to all the admirers of Mary Aikenhead and her work; and the kind and courteous nuns willingly show it to those who request the favour. In some respects it still remains the same as when the Reverend Mother occupied it. There is the same old-fashioned sofa and high-backed easy-chair, the very one perhaps in which she used to sit when she watched the setting sun from her window. It is a square, moderately large room, on the second storey of the house, with two windows, as you enter, looking out on the smooth green lawn studded with trees, and a pond at the end. A third window on the west side, close to one of the others, looks into a large garden, well stocked with fruit-trees and

vegetables, and fragrant in summer with flowers. The mantel-piece is on the same side of the wall ; and a large oil-painting in an oak frame hangs above it. The colours are now very dim, and the figure can only just be discerned of an aged hermit, who stands with a rapt look before an open book, his hands crossed in an attitude of deep rest. The floor is darkly stained and polished, and large, oak-coloured folding-doors occupy the wall opposite the front windows. A circular table stands in the middle of the room ; and here, with the mantel-piece and the ancient picture on her left hand, her majestic old form relieved against the dark folding-doors behind her, the "great old Mother" used to sit ; and we half fancy that we see her, with her books and writing materials before her, and could almost kneel on the spot, and imagine the saintly old hand raised to give the blessing which so many craved from her lips.

There were, of course, at that time many tokens, now vanished, of her children's love and care for her ; vases of flowers to gladden her eyes, a pot of musk, or fuchsia, perhaps, which she loved ; and some of the rare, ancient engravings on pious subjects that she was fond of and supplied to all her houses, decorated the walls. Hers is described as a life of prayer wonderful to behold. But in spite of confinement and severe and constant suffering, she had many small but true pleasures, in golden sunsets

and silver moon-rises, which she would enjoy on summer evenings with Mother Frances M'Carthy, or some other dear friend and disciple, by her side. Her love for the beauties of nature seemed to increase rather than diminish with old age. It soothed her weary eyes to gaze on the greenery around, and she delighted in watching the play of light and shade on the pond, and in observing the changes of the sky from morning till evening. "It was most animating," one of her friends said, "to hear her praising the beauties of a flower; for which reason her children vied with one another in having flowers to present to her, so that they might hear the grandeur of her praises of the great Creator. The tint, the leafage, the form, would be minutely examined, and praise returned to the Giver of all good gifts."

It was not difficult to amuse her almost to the last, and the wit and humour of her own remarks at times made her conversation very interesting. Others were never forgotten by her. She was particularly thoughtful about the lay-sisters, and if any of them were ill she was all concern lest they should be in the least degree overlooked. "I have my bell," she would say, "and there is no fear of my being forgotten; and if I am, I can ring it; and so can other Superiors. But these poor Sisters depend entirely on us." And she would give directions for special care of them.

Writing of Montalembert, Mrs. Oliphant, who knew him in his last days, makes the following

remarks, which seem strikingly applicable to Mrs. Aikenhead also :

“Never,” she says, “was there a more striking evidence of that vigour and life of the soul which is independent of, nay, almost in antagonism with, the strength of the body. . . . Death had nothing to do with such a man. Looking at him, the spectator felt it to be of all things the least credible. He was an embodied contradiction to that condition of humanity, an assertion of immortality more triumphant than argument. Physicians might say what they would, we believe that no one could have seen Montalembert in that prolonged and most painful passage of life without feeling a half indignant, half-contemptuous inclination to deny the possibility of dying. With such a deathless, brave, bright, and unconquerable individuality death had nothing to do.”

Perhaps similar thoughts may have occurred to some of Mrs. Aikenhead's children who were with her at this time. What, indeed, had death to do with such as Montalembert or Mary Aikenhead ?

But the end in this world was rapidly approaching. The time came when the Reverend Mother was unable to leave her bed. Dropsy became apparent, and when it subsided paralysis set in. But painful as were her maladies, they were the least part of her sufferings. She had had spiritual trials throughout her life such as the saints have

experienced. She had shared in many ways "the fellowship of the sufferings" of her Divine Lord; and now at the last she was called to share also that awful feeling of desolation which overcame the Eternal One upon the Cross, and elicited from His sacred lips the thrilling cry that seems still to ring through the centuries: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

She slept little during the night, but passed the hours in prayer. Over and over she would repeat the verse of the psalm: "For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him there is plentiful redemption." Or she would recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, sometimes slightly varying the titles of our Lady, and dwelling in a peculiarly reverent and impressive way on the invocations, *Honourable Vessel, Noble Vessel of Election, &c.* At other times she would go through the Rosary, substituting the "Hail, Holy Queen, *Mother of Mercy,*" for the Hail Mary. The awe-struck dread that she felt about receiving the Holy Communion was very painful, although in obedience she communicated several times in the week. Unfortunately her confessor did not seem able to understand her state of mind, so as to afford her the comfort he would gladly have given. One day, after he had left her, the infirmarian heard her murmur, as if thinking aloud: "No comfort, no support." The Sister ventured to remind her of St. Francis Xavier on the desert isle of Sanciano without one kindred spirit to commune

with. "True, child, true;" was the reply, and the subject was never mentioned again.

Yet this distress did not seem in the least to proceed from want of faith; rather it appeared to be the result of a deepened and intense realization of eternal things and awe for the majesty of God. No light or shallow soul ever felt as she did. Such often await death with too much ease and confidence. One of the virtues specially practised by her in those last days was humility. She would bend forward, bowing down her head, and say, with an affecting reverence: "Oh, that *I* should have *presumed* to offend the majesty of the great God!" Sometimes she would look round the room anxiously and seem uneasy at the care and attention she was receiving; although reminded that under her circumstances any Sister would meet with the same, according to her own directions.

Towards the end of March, 1858, the Reverend Mother received the last sacraments. Some time before her death her usual serenity of mind returned, and her soul seemed filled with a deep and sweet peace. About this time her friend, Dr. Russell, of the Order of Preachers, happened to be in Dublin, and paid her several visits, which afforded her great consolation and aid; his keen spiritual insight and knowledge enabling him to understand her feelings and sympathize with her in her trial. She had also several kind visits from Archbishop Cullen. On the 22nd of July, the

feast of St. Mary Magdalen, she received the Holy Viaticum, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon, with her dear children kneeling around her, she quietly breathed her last.

The mortal remains of Mother Mary Augustine Aikenhead were borne to the cemetery of the Congregation at St. Mary's, Donneybrook, where the Requiem Mass and Office took place. The funeral was numerously attended by both clergy and laity; and a large body of working men, who knew what a friend Mrs. Aikenhead had always been to their class, carried the coffin to the grave. In a crypt, under a beautiful limestone cross, erected by her friend, Mr. John H. Parker, the relics of the Reverend Mother rest in peace, awaiting the time of her joyful resurrection.

Her praises were pronounced in many a pulpit throughout the land. Public journals, not only in Ireland, but in England also, made mention of her noble life and the great work she had accomplished; the latter, probably, dwelling with that wondering admiration so often to be observed in such cases, on the self-abnegation of her life, as if the fact of a saint in these days were an extraordinary discovery. But to the Catholic it is not strange that there are still saints. The Church trains them. They have been since it began, even in the least spiritual ages; they will arise to the end of the world, to be its lights in the midst of a black expanse of wickedness or a dull spread of easy, mediocre goodness.

During the seventy-one years of Mary Aikenhead's life, she had seen a complete change take place in her native land. At the time of her birth Catholic Ireland lay like one bound fast with grave clothes. But she lived to see the nation start up rejuvenated; and her hand had been one of the first held out to lead it along the new path and to help to build up a new Ireland, which might yet be as beautiful and as holy as the Erin of the past. Mrs. Aikenhead's was indeed a work which, had her part in it been much less, might well have caused her joy and gratitude and made her feel that she had lived to some purpose: thousands of children throughout the country receiving free education in her schools; the sick-poor tenderly and carefully nursed; hundreds of penitents snatched from a life of sin and restored to spiritual health and strength. She had come to the work in the full flush of her youth and beauty, not bringing with her a withered heart and weary soul. But these, indeed, are rarely, if ever, to be found beneath the conventual habit; they are much more frequent in the luxurious drawing-room; for the work of a Sister of Charity needs above all things a heart not too withered to care for the sufferings of others, and a soul never weary in well-doing.

Truly it might be said of Mary Aikenhead, in the words of Scripture, that more are her children "than the children of the married wife." Not only the daughters of the Congregation, numerous

as these are, call her Mother, but the poor also, who have benefited by her work since its beginning, and will benefit still as long as the Order exists. All these "arise and call her blessed." "She rests from her labours, and her works do follow her." Amen.

THE END.

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